Bodies, Borders and Boundaries

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BODIES BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

Erotic transactions and intra-regional migrations in Ecuador

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Erotic transactions and intra-regional migrations in Ecuador

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INTRODUCTION

MIGRATION, SEXUALITY AND BORDERS

Katty, a 35-year-old Colombian woman, moved to Ecuador in 2001 after receiving a job offer to work in an exclusive nightclub in El Oro, a province located in the southern coast of Ecuador that borders Peru. She offered sexual services in this and other sex businesses of the province for about two years. In 2003, however, controls and restrictions targeting trans-border migrants increased, under the argument of protecting "local labor" and preventing "foreign delinquency." As these controls were particularly frequent in sex businesses, Katty was forced to leave the public and formal spaces of the local sex industry, which is made up of daytime brothels and nightclubs that are regulated by the Ecuadorian state. Having to support her teen-age daughter all on her own and unwilling to return to her origin country, affected by a long history of violence, this migrant contacted former clients and engaged in sporadic heterosexual encounters that combine sex, companionship, friendship, and different forms of material gain. Katty defines her intimate male partners as "friends" rather than "clients," and she does not identify with the labels usually attached to women involved in commercial sex: "sex trafficking victim" or "sex worker."

The story of Nancy is slightly different. This 21-year-old (in 2006, the time of our first meeting) Peruvian woman, single and with no children, arrived in El Oro in 2005, looking for a job and enticed by the dollarized economy in a neighboring country like Ecuador. A female acquaintance got her a job at a *barra-bar* in Machala, the provincial capital, where she serves drinks, accompanies and dances with clients. Barras-bar are part of the informal spaces of El Oro's sex sector, and women working in these places are seen as "clandestine prostitutes." Nancy rejects this derogative term and she defines herself as a "waitress." Despite her irregular migration status, this woman explains that she has not encountered any major problems with migration police officials because she can easily "pass" for an Ecuadorian due to her accent and physical appearance. Furthermore, Nancy

considers that crossing the Ecuadorian border is rather easy because a tourist visa is not required for Peruvians (or Colombians) and the Ecuador–Peru border is permanently open. Nevertheless, she also believes that obtaining a work permit or a resident visa in Ecuador is quite difficult, especially for a barra-bar waitress.

The above stories suggest that migrant women in the sex industry embody many of the fears and dilemmas raised by globalization and regionalization. While these two processes celebrate openness, contact, and integration, they simultaneously stimulate "fears of penetration" (Kulick 2003) that reveal anxieties about migrant and sexual "others", and thus encourage the adoption of restrictive regulations towards cross-border migrations and commercial sexual activities. This occurs because the bodies of migrants like Katty and Nancy, seen as open, offered, or vulnerable to others, are symbolically linked to the borders of the nation-state, where openness and permeability are perceived as sites of economic, social, and moral danger. In the words of Elizabeth Bernstein (2004: 9): "anxieties about slippery national borders are deflected onto anxieties about slippery moral borders," which affix themselves onto the bodies of migrant women in the sex industry.

This dissertation, therefore, focuses on those women who cross the physical borders of the state as well as the moral orders and boundaries of sexuality and gender. It highlights the ways in which sexuality structures different aspects of migration, and it calls for a reflection on borders not only as metaphorical images and symbolic limit lines (which I will refer to in this thesis as boundaries) but also as localized territories and geopolitical divisions that have concrete material consequences for migrants.

Analyses of transnational sexual commerce are very often conflated with sex trafficking, a problem that certainly needs further investigation. In contrast, this ethnographic research concentrates on the experiences of working-class adult women who engage in multiple intimate-economic exchanges ─sexual and eroticized services in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar as well as informal and

sporadic exchanges of sex, intimacy, and material gain that take place in daily life relationships[1]—, as part of their migration process and without the involvement of trafficking networks. The stories of this group of migrants[2] have been largely ignored or have been analyzed under an "anomaly perspective" (Agustín 2001), such as criminality and health disorders. Thus, the scarce studies on women in the sex industry from a migration research framework prompted this research project.

I argue that the theoretical framework of migration studies allows for a more comprehensive look at the experiences of migrants engaged in commercial sexual relations. Through this framework, different aspects of these migrants' lives are explored, such as motivations to migrate, choices regarding employment, broader integration in the host country, and transnational family relationships; consequently, the experiences of these migrant women are not restricted to their sexual encounters. That is to say, I do not use migration as an adjective for the women involved in the sex trade, as many studies on the topic do when referring to "migrant sex workers."[3] Instead, guided by feminist migration studies[4] and queer migration scholarship[5], migration is seen as a socioeconomic, political, and cultural process that deeply affects individuals' identities and their links with family, home and nation; it is also seen as the context that informs and transforms migrants' intimate experiences as well as their meanings of sexuality.

The theoretical framework in which this study is embedded allows me to explore the particular ways in which migration connects with sexuality and borders. In addition, the prominence this work gives to the voices, arguments and subjective experiences of those involved in intimate-economic exchanges brings up nuances and complexities that are not always taken into consideration in analyses about migrants in the sex industry. Therefore, I claim that the daily life experiences of this migrant group, and their self-perceptions/representations, complicate simple understandings of sexual commerce, as well as dichotomist notions of borders and boundaries, seen either as strict markers and impenetrable barriers or as divisions that are disappearing with globalization and regionalization.

Excluded on the basis of sexuality and its interconnections with gender, class, and nation, migrant women in the sex trade show how new barriers to cross-border movements and new divisions between "nationals" and "non-nationals" are constructed in a context of regional integration. Yet paying close attention to the lives and self-accounts of these migrants reveals the strategies and discourses through which they contest divisions and migration restrictions, while calling into question the rigid sexual categorizations and binary labels (sex worker/sex trafficking victim, guilty/innocent, agent/object) that are often used to define women in commercial sexual relations.

Certainly, in the midst of regional integration projects in the Andean sub-region of South America, the daily life experiences of working-class Colombians and Peruvians, who can easily cross into Ecuador due to free circulation and border integration agreements but simultaneously find difficulties to legally work or reside in this country, expose two parallel and contradictory processes that require theoretical and political consideration.

On the one hand, the transformations of state borders and the changing notions of belonging and citizenship that result from regional integration agreements. In the Andean sub-region in particular, and in Latin America more generally, integration and the formation of regional blocs —processes that have intensified since the late 1990s— are tied to ideas of "brotherhood" or common origin that supposedly facilitate the consolidation of an integrated space and a broader and more inclusive notion of citizenship.

On the other hand, the limitations of Latin American regionalization processes that are still conditioned by national, class, and sexual concerns, and in which intra-regional migrations and migrants' rights are still marginal issues in the integration agenda.[6] In this dissertation I explain how border openness and integration projects in the Andean sub-region concur with restrictive migration regulations and border controls that attempt to mark the limits of the Ecuadorian nation-state and constrain the possibilities of "unwanted migrants."

But this study also looks at the ways in which working-class Colombian and Peruvian women maneuver to accomplish their migration plans in Ecuador. I will show that sexuality, eroticism, and emotionality are important means allowing these migrants to incorporate into the Ecuadorian (informal) labor market and get access to economic resources. In addition, sexuality, eroticism, and emotionality construct the personal ties that facilitate migrants' legal residency and integration, helping them confront daily life difficulties including migration restrictions and border controls. I look at these intimate encounters as "sites for the exercise of individual agency" (Cheng 2007), or ways that marginalized women have to negotiate subordination and pursue their projects of aspiration in migration contexts marked by increasing inequalities. By exposing the ways in which Colombian and Peruvian women combine sex, friendship, care, romance, money, gifts, and other forms of material gain with clients, friends, and boyfriends, this research calls for a revision of the supposedly clear-cut boundaries between intimacy and materiality.

In sum, this dissertation shows that, in trans-border migration contexts characterized by the tension between flows and restrictions, integration and exclusion, control and evasion, sexuality is both constraining and enabling, and, thus, it has a dual and conflicting function in the lives of women engaged in trans-border migration movements. Sexuality becomes one of the sites where national boundaries are reinforced and state control is strengthened; simultaneously, sexuality becomes the means through which working-class women find opportunities and spaces of inclusion, thus contesting still restrictive notions of citizenship and belonging.

Hence, this PhD thesis asks what can the movements and experiences of Peruvian and Colombian women engaged in intimate-economic exchanges in Ecuador tell us about sexual commerce, South-South migrations, borders, and regional integration. More specific and key questions that guided this research were: how do normative understandings of sexuality, gender, and nation influence the migration experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women engaged in the

Ecuadorian sex sector? How are the commercial sexual activities and intimate relations of these women informed by the context of migration? What are the structural forces guiding the experiences of this migrant group? How do these migrants respond to and/or negotiate migration obstacles and the sexual categories imposed on them? What are the priorities and concerns of this group of migrants?

There are three aspects of my work that could make contributions and offer new insights into the literature I engage with: migration, sexuality and borders, as well as sex work studies, and queer migration scholarship[7].

First, whereas scholars studying international migrations and the global sex industry have largely concentrated on long distance movements, from South to North, and the demand for "third world women" by "first world men," with the hierarchies of class, race, and color that this approach implies, this study looks at intra-regional movements within the so-called global South and intimate-material encounters involving participants with similar ethnic, class, linguistic, and geopolitical backgrounds. Thus, focusing on the experiences of Colombian and Peruvian migrant women engaged in commercial sexual relationships in Ecuador, my intention is to explicate the particularities of South-South migrations and the ways in which processes of eroticization, desirability, difference, and inequality take place in the context of short distance ─geographically and culturally speaking─ migrations. In so doing, I also intend to fill the gap existing in migration literature in general, and queer migration scholarship in particular, in relation to South-South migration processes.

Second, I situate my analysis in a concrete border territory: the El Oro province, Ecuador's southern border. Thus, I look at borders not only as "dispersed" and "stretching" spaces in a globalized interconnected world, such as the "global cities" that have concentrated the attention of numerous scholars.[8] Although I recognize the fact that borders are extending their social power and becoming regions, zones and even countries (Paasi 2009), my interest in looking at borders from the physical margins of a specific nation-state is an attempt to

highlight that borders have localized histories and particular manifestations in border areas. This follows scholars like Vila (2003b) and Grimson (2000a, 2000c) who question mainstream border theory, where borders have become ubiquitous terms or a simple metaphor that represents any situation where limits are involved. Along with them, I call for studies that look at cultural and symbolic boundaries from the specificity of territorial and political borders as a way to overcome abstract, homogenizing, and superficial analyses of borders.

Third, contrary to some queer migration literature and some feminist studies concerning transnational sexual commerce, which have favored an analytic framework centered on control, exclusion, and often on exploitation and violence,[9] in this study, I highlight the heterogeneous, ambivalent, and contradictory experiences migrant women involved in commercial sexual exchanges encounter. I argue that these intimate-economic exchanges offer opportunities to certain groups of migrants while simultaneously increasing vulnerabilities, restrictions, and control. Hence, my emphasis on migrants' strategies and subjective experiences does not intend to favor agency over oppression, inclusion over exclusion. Instead, my analysis attempts to overtake binary concepts in order to explore the differential, stratified, and marginal inclusion of female migrant workers involved in sexual and eroticized services as well as in other intimate-material relations in globalized capitalist economies.

Context and setting

Since the year 2000, Ecuador became a new pole of attraction for migrants in the Andean sub-region of South America. Curiously, these intra-regional migration flows began when Ecuador was confronting a grave financial and economic crisis that peaked in March 1999, when the Ecuadorian government froze private bank deposits and Ecuador then adopted the U.S dollar as its official currency (January 2000).

Ecuador's financial crisis brought about the exodus of thousands of Ecuadorians to northern industrialized countries; simultaneously, it motivated significant numbers of Colombian and Peruvian workers to move into Ecuador, enticed by dollarized wages and, according to some authors, responding to labor shortages in provinces with high rates of out-migration (Serageldin et al. 2004). Although information about the number of Colombians and Peruvians in Ecuador is not precise due to informal border crossings and the irregular migration status of many of these migrants, some official statistics indicate that between 2000 and 2010 the movements of these two national groups into Ecuador registered a net migration (difference between entries and exits) of around one million people.[10] Border provinces like El Oro have experienced these migration movements in particular ways.

Located in the southern coast of Ecuador, El Oro is a region historically linked to foreign capital and highly dependent on the exports of primary products, such as banana, cocoa, shrimp, and gold, with the latter giving the province its name (El Oro means "the gold"). This province's contribution to the national economy has been quite important, since the main source of revenue of the Ecuadorian state is the export of primary products.

Since the mid-1990s, banana production and exports stimulated an important although unequal economic growth in El Oro, attracting internal and more recently international migrant workers. Having a port ─Puerto Bolivar─, located only five kilometers away from Machala, and sharing a border with Peru have also contributed to El Oro's commercial dynamism and its intense movement of goods, capital, and persons, making it especially suited for the growth of the sex industry; an industry where impoverished female workers, both locals and migrants, find a source of income and employment opportunities.

But apart from the economic dynamics that stimulate the movements of Peruvians and Colombians into El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces, there are also important political processes that explain these intra-regional migrations. On

the one hand, the expansion and deterioration of the armed and political conflict in Colombia since the late 1990s has led thousands of Colombian men and women to seek refuge and protection in Ecuador. Although many Colombians have settled in northern Ecuadorian provinces, others have moved to more central and even southern regions (Azuay and El Oro, among them), following work opportunities as well as their social networks. In this work, I will explain how the connections between the Colombian internal conflict with drug trafficking, and illegal armed groups have motivated public concerns about "illicit cross-border flows" and "regional threats" while they have also stigmatized Colombians in Ecuador and stimulated restrictive migration regulations.

On the other hand, bilateral and multilateral integration agreements adopted by the Community of Andean Nations (CAN)—currently integrated by Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia—have facilitated and thus motivated Andean citizens to cross to neighboring or so-called "brother countries." Indeed, since the late 1990s and the early 2000s, CAN has made important efforts to ease the circulation of goods, services, and people across this sub-region and to do so it has adopted a series of legal measures, among them the elimination of tourist visas for citizens of CAN member states.

The Ecuador–Peru border and in particular the border area between the Ecuadorian province of El Oro and the Peruvian department of Tumbes[11] (the Ecuadorian side of which is the focus of this study) is, at first sight, a good example of CAN's attempts to achieve free circulation and integration. After a long territorial dispute that ended with a peace treaty signed in 1998, Ecuadorian and Peruvian authorities adopted several agreements in order to advance integration between these two countries and especially between border regions. Nowadays, the openness of this border, connected by the international bridge of Huaquillas (Ecuador) and Aguas Verdes (Peru),[12] and the vivid and usually informal exchanges between local populations have made this area an icon of "real integration." At the same time, the permeability of this border tends to be linked to images of "disorder" and associated to "illicit activities," such as goods'

smuggling, "illegal" labor migrations, and sex trafficking, that, according to different national and local actors, threaten the nation's security and sovereignty. Consequently, contact and tension, flows and controls, alliances and exclusionary practices are part of daily life in this interconnected border area.

Theoretical framework

I started this research project with the idea that I was investigating migrant women's engagement in "sex work", this understood as an income-generating activity that involves the exchange of sex for money. Nonetheless, the stories of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador, such as the ones presented at the beginning of this introduction, revealed that although most of the intimate encounters these migrants were involved in comprised commodified sex, many of them did not fit in the category of "sex work" and, more importantly, most of these women did not define these encounters as such. Through my ethnographic work, I realized that these women's migration experiences were informed in different ways by sexuality and, in turn, their involvement in intimate-material relations was influenced by the context of migration.

Hence, I adopted a migration research framework to look more integrally at the experiences of migrant women engaged in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations, taking into consideration the structural forces and social representations that inform these experiences and migrant women's own accounts and strategies. Through this framework, my research subjects are principally seen as migrants rather than as sex workers, although it is emphasized that being a migrant in the sex industry adds an extra dimension, the sexual dimension, which makes the experiences of these women different from those of other migrant groups. By framing my analysis in this way, I invert discussions about migrants in the sex trade, which generally tend to see these women as sex workers who move across borders. My study looks at migrant women that, as part of their migration

experiences, engage in different intimate-material relations, one of which is sex work.

The framework of migration studies is supported by three theoretical perspectives that serve to rethink the involvement of migrant women in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations. In what follows, I elaborate on the theoretical relations this dissertation is built on, and that link migration to intimacy and borders in a very particular manner. These are: migration-sexuality connections; sexual commerce and the transformation of intimacy; and contemporary theories of borders/boundaries.

Migration-sexuality connections

The intersection of migration and sexuality in the lives of migrant women plays a significant role in the development of the argument of this thesis. This relationship is analyzed from two perspectives. First, this thesis explores how sexuality structures different aspects of migration. This includes migration policies, women's motivations to migrate, migrants' incorporation into the labor market, their integration in the host country, and their relations with their families back home. Secondly, and no less important, this work explores the way in which migration contexts inform and transform constructions of sexuality, such as sexual imageries, practices, identities, categories, and meanings.

Migration is understood as a dynamic process—not only permanent, but also temporary and circular—motivated by multiple and interrelated causes, such as structural and individual factors, household dynamics, labor market demands, and social networks. These migrant trajectories are lived and experienced differently depending on the social locations/positions of individuals and groups: their class, gender, sexuality, nationality, migration status, etc. As Pessar and Mahler (2003) assert, these locations are produced within inter-connected power relations created through historical, political, economic, geographic, and other socially stratifying factors (see also Mahler and Pessar 2006).

Understanding migration movements in the way illustrated above offers insight into various migration patterns in general. Yet to understand South-South migrations—those between two developing countries—there are specific particularities needed to be taken into account. In the first place, income differences between origin and destination are less pronounced and more unstable in south-south movements than in south to north migration flows (Ratha and Shaw 2007; Parrado and Cerrutti 2003). Secondly, ethnic and racial hierarchies are more subtle or ambiguous, and historical processes have created visible social and cultural ties between populations in origin and destination countries, as is the case in the South American region. Nonetheless, despite the lesser degree of differentiation between countries of the global South, migration processes are unconditionally structured through power relations.

Relations of power are also recognized in the study of sexuality, a topic that is considered within the literature on social construction. This literature explains that although sex feels individual and private, and sexuality is in fact personal and subjective, it is never trans-historical, fixed, and self-evident. Rather, "our emotions, desires and relationships are shaped by the society [or societies] we live in" (Carledge and Ryan, quoted by Weeks 2003: 17), and more precisely by its economic forces and its gendered ideologies and norms. Therefore, "physical identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and subjective meanings, depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods" (Vance 1999: 43).

Thus, sexuality is understood as shaped at the juncture of society and subjectivity (Weeks 2003). While society sets forth concerns about public well-being and order, future growth, and the prosperity of the population as a whole and therefore imposes different forms of regulation on sexuality, subjectivity connects to the self and the lived experiences of the individual, whose intimate life is guided by different emotions, needs, and desires and not only by social prescriptions. In this sense, individuals embody different sexual subjectivities and their meanings

and expressions of sexuality both exist within and contest hegemonic discourses and norms.

Literature exploring migration-sexuality links has largely focused on how same-sex desire and sexual difference motivates certain persons to cross borders to find new life possibilities and distance themselves from experiences of discrimination, as in the case of migrants identified as LGBTQ.[13] This research adds to this literature by focusing on heterosexualities and illustrating the ways in which the commodification of non-national, "Other" women, which goes hand-in-hand with their exoticization and eroticization (Kempadoo 2000), can encourage gendered and sexualized labor recruitment processes that guide migrants' differential inclusion in destination countries. Female sexuality and the norms and ideologies that accompany it also influence migrant women's settlement, integration, and relations with families in origin countries.

Hence, examining the role sexuality plays in the process of migration means, in the first place, recognizing sexuality not only as another variable in the study of migrations but rather as an axis of power that guides migrants' heterogeneous experiences and migration regimes (Cantú et al. 2009). Additionally, it questions the normative deployment of sexuality in migration literature, where female migrants tend to be portrayed as asexual figures and sexuality is relegated to family life and heterosexual reproduction, closeted with morality or violence, or simply conflated with gender (see the critics of Manalansan 2006 in this regard). Scholars examining the connections between migration and sexuality view migrant women (and men) not only as laboring gendered agents but also as desiring subjects whose lives and erotic experiences are redefined within the context of migration (Epps et al. 2005; González-López 2005). These studies, however, have scarcely examined the experiences of migrant women in the sex industry; the few exceptions (e.g. Luibhéid 2002) explain how norms about morality and sexuality, representations and controls directed at this group of migrants implicate one another.

Eithne Luibhéid illustrates how, in specific contexts, fears about the "future of the nation" become channeled into concerns about "undesirable migrants." Historically, women moving to work in the sex trade have been among the first groups defined as "undesirable migrants" and thus excluded or put under surveillance. This reveals that states' migration policies are inextricably interconnected to the sexual and gendered construction of the nation and national belonging. As Luibhéid says: "immigration control has been … integral to the reproduction of patriarchal heterosexuality as the nation's official sexual and gender order" (2002: xviii). Therefore, "the prostitute," who fails to conform to the official norms and orders of the nation, is refused entry or faces distinct difficulties to becoming a legal resident.

Contrary to Luibhéid's work, in this dissertation I show that representations of and discourses about migrant women in the sex industry are not only linked to ideas of undesirability. Peruvian and Colombian women in the Ecuadorian sex sector are represented differently by different groups: they are perceived as sexually desirable, as sexual deviants/threats, and as sexual victims. All these images, though, follow analogous processes of generalization and stigmatization; moreover, they provoke restrictive or protective measures with similar exclusionary outcomes, confirming that anxieties regarding migration and sexuality and the need to control migrants and female bodies have long gone hand in hand (Andrijasevic 2009; Luibhéid 2008). This will be further elaborated in chapter 4.

The study of migration-sexuality connections leads to another important area of inquiry. This area examines how sexual identities, categories, and meanings are variously claimed, inhabited, and rearticulated in different locations and time periods (Luibhéid and Cantú 2005). In this sense, migration and border-crossings become important sites for the understanding, revaluation, and "translation of the sexual" (Viteri 2008).

As the work of González-López (2005) on the sexual lives of Mexican migrants shows, during border crossings, women and men continually transform their experiences of femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality. Women's sexual moralities and beliefs about sexual pleasure and virginity, for example, are impacted, in non-linear fashions, by the process of migration. In a similar vein, this thesis argues that Colombian and Peruvian women redefine the meanings of commercial sex and other intimate-material relations guided by their socioeconomic position and their border-crossing experience. The self-perceptions and self-representations of these migrants reveal that the meanings women give to commercial sex and other erotic transactions are not homogeneous, self-evident, or static but rather ambivalent and even contradictory. Likewise, their self-accounts illustrate that the "global" concept of "sex work/sex worker" moves across geographic locations and changes in relation to multiple subject positions, as I explain in chapter 5.

Thus, my work shows that migration and sexuality inform each other and are interconnected to dynamics of gender, class, and nation.

Sexual commerce and the transformations of intimacy

Sexual commerce and the sex industry are implicated in broader political and socioeconomic processes, and linked to global capitalism and transnational mobility and migration (Lim 1998; Altmann 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Bernstein 2008). Some authors explain, for example, that in neoliberal contexts where inequalities are exacerbated and State services are retrenched, international migrations and commercial sex become means through which women are incorporated into the global economy (Sassen 2002; Cabezas 2009).

Thus, in this dissertation, commercial sex and other intimate-material encounters are understood not only as income-generating activities but also as strategies used by marginalized women to move ahead (Brennan 2004). The theoretical position I adopt in relation to the study of sexual commerce takes a sex

workers' rights perspective as its starting point, but it simultaneously exposes the limitations of the notions of "sex work" and "sex workers." To further elaborate on this position, it is important to briefly explain the two main, opposite approaches to the analysis of commercial sex: the first one conceives of commercial sexual activities as "sex work," and the second one as "sexual slavery."

The conceptualization of commercial sex as an income-generating activity and a form of labor for women (as well as for men and transgender people) has been part of feminist debates since the 1970s. This conceptualization emerged under the banner of organized women in the sex industry who tried to find a concept to distance themselves from derogative and stigmatizing discourses while at the same time stressing their social location as "working people." In many places around the globe, including the Ecuadorian province of El Oro, the "sex work(er)" category has been adopted as a political concept by organized working-class women in the sex trade and their middle-class feminist allies. These organized women struggle against the existing violence and exploitative working conditions in the sex industry and they demand rights as workers and women (Abad et al. 1998; Manzo and Murray 2002).

Some feminists, however, strongly oppose the idea of seeing paid sex as a form of labor because, according to them, women do not freely choose to sell sex, especially in the so-called "third world" where involvement in the sex trade is forced on them not only by pimps and trafficking organizations, but also by poverty and strict "patriarchal structures of power" (Barry 1996; Pateman 1988). For this group of feminists, recognizing paid sex as work would imply the normalization of sexual relations that are perceived not only as intrinsically violent and exploitative, but also as dehumanizing, detached, and devoid of affection. This standpoint presents several problems.

In the first place, liberal understandings of "choice" obscure the complexities that frame labor under late capitalism, where informalization, precariousness, and gaps of identity and labor guide most workers' experiences

(Cabezas 2009); moreover, the binary opposition of "choice" and "force" ignores the complex contexts in which women make choices when confronted with limited economic opportunities (Kapur 2001). Similarly, in these feminist discourses, notions of power and violence are rather narrow and packed with oppositional assumptions. It is assumed, for example, that violence is disconnected from practices of resistance, and that "patriarchal power" is all-encompassing; consequently, this approach erases female agency.

In contrast to the above perspective, different theoretical and empirical studies, including this dissertation, stress that women in commercial sexual activities are situated in the continuums of oppression and agency, control and resistance, constraints and opportunities; this position recognizes the ambivalent and contradictory contexts in which women experience and negotiate sexuality (Phoenix 2001; Vance 1984). These studies also understand violence in the sex trade as connected to social stigma, legal regimes, and structural inequalities—gendered, but also class, ethnic and geopolitical—rather than seeing sexual commerce as a form of violence in itself (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Pheterson 1996).

Secondly, feminist discourses that oppose the conceptualization of paid sex as a form of labor and instead define it as "sexual slavery" tend to make strict distinctions between "genuine" or "loving sex"—altruistic, attached, affective, and respectful—and sexual relations in prostitution, which are defined as exactly the opposite (e.g. Pateman 1988). By doing so, feminists in this group "confirm currently normative understandings of 'genuine' sex as in some way outside power" (Scoular 2004: 346). Furthermore, ideas about "genuine" or "true sex" confuse the commercialization of sexual services with a particular morality about sexual relations and, accordingly, they impose a universal meaning of sex. For Kempadoo, this ignores the "changing perceptions and values as well as the variety of meanings that women and men hold about their sexual lives" (1998: 5).

More recent critics of the "sexual slavery" theory have argued that stressing the boundaries between affective and detached personal relationships, free

and paid traditional female services ignores the complex changes taking place in late capitalist economies, where social relations in general, and intimate life in particular, are linked to the marketplace and to global patterns of consumption (Constable 2009; Bernstein 2007). In other words, global capitalism has reaffirmed the connections between intimacy, emotionality, and commodification as well as the ways in which labor has been eroticized and connected to care and entertainment (Cabezas 2009, 2004; Ehreinreich and Hoschild 2002).

Indeed, a growing body of literature explains how economic and cultural transformations resulting from global capitalism have informed and transformed the subjective experiences of intimacy, sexuality, and romance, including contemporary patterns of sexual commerce. Some authors have defined the intimate-material connections taking place in the international sex industry as "performances of love" used to turn a commercial sexual transaction into a long-term relationship that can provide greater benefits (Brennan 2004). Others, in contrast, have examined these relationships as part of the "circulation of affect in the sexual economy." This is the case of Amalia Cabezas. Her work on sexualized tourism settings in the Caribbean shows that different group of women (and men), and not only organized sex workers, engage in ambiguous and sporadic transnational relationships mixing sex, intimacy, affect, and material exchanges as a way to alleviate daily life economic privations. Cabezas claims, however, that many of these intimate relationships could be neither reduced to "work" nor to "sex," and therefore the concept of "sex work" is not always adequate to represent them (see also Piscitelli 2007; Uygun 2004).

Along with the literature described above, in this dissertation I illustrate how patterns of sexual commerce have transformed and diversified in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces due to changes that have occurred in the economy and cultural life, going hand in hand with technological innovations. Concomitantly, I question whether the confluence of intimacy, sex, and materiality is solely related to late capitalism and middle classes, as Cabezas (2004, 2009) and Bernstein

(2007), respectively, suggest. Various interesting empirical studies[14] reveal that, in different times and places, women confronted with subsistence and consumption engage in intimate-material relations sustained by gifts and economic aid. These relationships go beyond the framework of prostitution and sex work. Thus, some authors have defined them as "transactional," "survival," or "compensated sex". The story told by one of my interviewees can exemplify this point.

One day Piedad (Peruvian) told me the story of her working name. Her choice of a Spanish name is rather unusual among women in brothels and nightclubs, who tend to adopt English names or names that otherwise sound "modern" or "artistic." But her name, meaning "piety," is not only old fashioned but quite uncommon in the sex trade. I asked about her choice and she answered that this was the name of her deceased grandmother. "*Era bien puta*" (she was really a whore), she said with a subtle smile in her face, and she explained that when her grandfather died, her grandmother—alone and without a source of revenue—made a pragmatic (my words) decision, the lesson of which she passed on to her daughters and granddaughters. Her recommendation was: "you have to think of your future; if a man leaves, quickly find another one who can support you and give you money."

Hence, in this dissertation I look at the different intimate-material encounters migrant women engage in, either inside the sex industry or as part of broader daily life relationships that go beyond the context of work. My objective is to explore the subjective meanings migrants give to these relationships and expose the shifting and blurry boundaries between commercial and non-commercial sex, intimacy, and materiality.

Borders, bodies, and the boundaries of the nation

The experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women involved in different erotic transactions in Ecuador offer new insights into the ways in which migration movements, on the one hand, and sexuality and gender, on the other, inform

notions of borders, boundaries, and national belonging. This topic is particularly interesting if we take into consideration the transformations that are reshaping borders and boundaries in the context of regional integration projects.

For a long time, borders have been thought of as natural markers between state, nation, and territory. This perspective is based on ideas about the existence of territorial spaces divided by fixed lines and supposedly enclosing essentially different cultures and peoples. Ethnographic studies and constructionist border theories have complicated these conceptions.[15] Likewise, regionalization—a strategy adopted to respond to the dynamics of globalization, by consolidating regions and strengthening economic and social networks within integrated spaces—has called into question notions of borders as natural, isolated, and static.

Certainly, the changes brought about by globalization and regionalization have impacted in the spatiality and the rationale of geopolitical borders, which are now more diffused, porous and networked. As several authors have documented for the case of the European Union (EU), regional integration processes have generated changes in the notions of territorial sovereignty, citizenship, and belonging, which "no longer map neatly onto spaces of the nation-state" (Andrijasevic 2009: 398). International migrations have played an important role in these transformations because they have fostered the idea of firm national borders and a homogeneous national identity while generating a sense of anxiety and insecurity, or what Berman (2003) calls a "crisis over boundaries." But how do sexuality and gender intervene in this process?

Borders, boundaries, and sexuality are intimately interrelated, although very few studies have analyzed this triple connection. Feminist research offers important analyses of the ways in which gender and sexuality norms construct the boundaries of national and ethnic collectivities (e.g. Yuval-Davis 1997; Mayer 2000). These boundaries both create the distinctions between "us" and "them," self" and "others" and establish internal hierarchies in relation to membership. Thus, referring to the construction of the nation as an "imagined community"

(Anderson 1991), Tammar Mayer explains that nation-building is in fact a masculinist and heterosexist project, where "femininity is generally produced as a means of supporting the nation's construction, through symbolic, moral and biological reproduction" (2000: 16). Moreover, she claims that "when nation, gender and sexuality intersect, the body becomes an important marker—even a boundary—for the nation" (p. 18, 19).

Indeed, as guardians of the nation and protectors of morality, women's bodies are sites of increased surveillance, especially at moments of political upheaval or social and economic transformations such as those brought about by globalization and regional integration (Berman 2003). During those moments, women that transgress the very borders and orders they have been historically and discursively compelled to uphold are "deemed foreign to or not part of the political community," as feminist anthropologist Ann Stoler (1995) has noted (cited in Berman 2003: 61). Feminist scholars, however, have focused on how symbolic division lines like those of gender, sexuality, class, and race are drawn in nation-building projects and in old and new understandings of citizenship; but they have paid less attention to the ways in which these differentiation practices have spatial manifestations and particular expressions in border territories.

More recently, to overcome the still separate analyses of borders and boundaries, some authors have made these intrinsic connections explicit. Fassin (2011), for instance, has argued that "policing borders" and "producing boundaries" are parallel and interconnected processes that reveal the ways in which migration is governed and experienced. This means that erecting walls and limiting people's movement across borders through selective and restrictive migration policies and tightened border control are all strategies that aid and reinforce the process of differentiation and symbolic exclusion of the migrant "other," which is based on racialization and stigmatization. Thus, Fassin questions optimistic views of globalization and regionalization as processes of border effacement. Nonetheless, two limitations are immediately apparent in Fassin's study: this author not only overlooks the role sexuality and gender play in

border/boundary maintenance but also refers to geographic borders in very abstract and general terms.

Caggiano (2007), Vila (2003), Wilson and Donnan (1998), Donnan and Wilson (1999) are among the few works that look at the confluence of symbolic boundaries and geographic-political borders, taking into consideration the important role of sexuality and gender—and its interconnections with class, race, and other markers of difference—in reinforcing national boundaries and territorial borders. Relying on this body work, this study examines the images, discourses, and the formal and informal responses that the sexualized "foreign bodies" of Colombian and Peruvian women provoke when crossing the Ecuadorian border.

Both Vila and Donnan and Wilson argue that sex and prostitution more specifically are issues that frequently emerge in border regions and pervade different topics, including those that do not necessarily have an explicitly sexual or gendered dimension. The reason for this, Vila argues, is the "close relationship … between the limits of the body and the limits of any social system, limits that are crucial in any border situation" (2003a: 75). Vila's analysis draws on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas who states that the body is a symbol of society: it is "a model which can stand for any bound system," and "its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas 1966:116). This is because all margins are dangerous and all systems are vulnerable at its margins. Therefore, if the body is a site in which open systems converge, an unregulated permeability can bring about danger and pollution.

The above reflections serve to elucidate why discourses about the border in El Oro make frequent references to and generate public anxieties about foreign women involved in commercial sexual activities. In these women's bodies, a series of collective fears relating to the security and well-being of the nation-state merge. In the context of the border, their porous bodies represent the risks that are present in societies where borders are also porous and thus in danger of intrusion, disorder, and contamination from the "other" (Vila 2003a). Thus, to defend the body politic,

both symbolic and material protection is required. Symbolically protection is pursued by controlling gendered identities and protecting and regulating female bodies, which "become synonymous with the political order at the edges of the state" (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 19).

Consequently, despite the important changes reshaping borders around the world, these political divisions are institutions that still serve to draw territorial limits, while marking the boundaries of state security and sovereignty, national identities, belonging, and rights of individual citizenship. In regional integration contexts, however, borders disappear in some ways and appear in others. The Andean sub-region of South America represents a particular and interesting case that has remained virtually unstudied. Here, Andean citizens enjoy the right to cross borders freely but not necessarily the rights of permanent residency and legal access to work in a neighboring country, as I explained earlier. Moreover, in this context of geographic and cultural proximity, distinctions between "nationals" and "foreigners" are difficult to ascertain: they all speak the same language, profess the same religion, and share similar ethnic and class backgrounds. How then are differences and hierarchies between "nationals" and "foreigners" delineated and enforced?

Contrary to most of the existing migration and border literature, which focuses on race and class as elements of differentiation and hierarchization in migration and border contexts, this study underlines the role of sexuality and national origin as markers of difference and hierarchy. I will explain how these two markers of difference overlap in a process that I call the sexual stigmatization of national origin. This process naturalizes distinctions between those seen as belonging and those seen as not belonging to the nation, and this justifies exclusions, discrimination, and abuses that are expressed in daily life social relations and in territorial demarcations.

Borders, however, are conceptualized in this dissertation both as firmly existing geographical and symbolic limitations and as open or penetrable entities. This situation certainly produces ambivalent and contradictory consequences.

Thus, Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador experience borders as open or permeable zones offering them different opportunities, but they also experience them as sites of restrictions and control. In this contested field of the border, sexuality becomes one of the sites where boundaries are imagined and negotiated: sexuality stimulates particular forms of differentiation, restrictions, and control, as discussed above, and simultaneously becomes the means through which marginalized women contest these restrictions and attempt to find spaces of inclusion. I will show that one of these spaces of inclusion is the border sex trade. Sustained by an economic model that requires a "cheap and exploitable labor force," as well as an increasing demand for mobile and "exotic girls," the El Oro sex trade offers unskilled migrant women access to income and employment, and, thus, a chance to fulfill their migration projects.

The research process

Social science researchers have argued that an honest account of knowledge production and the circumstances of the research process—not only a perfunctory note on methodology—is essential for the evaluation of the facts and interpretations presented in a social-scientific report (e.g. Bourdieu 1996; Abu-Lughod 1986). These scholars start from the premise that knowledge or "research data" are never simply "discovered"; rather, they are constructed from the particular social position of the researcher and its "power-charged social relations" with research subjects (Haraway 1988). Method and content are not separate entities (Rosaldo 2000), and one's social location (in relation to class, gender, ethnicity, national origin, etc.) and values influence research interactions, analysis, and representations.

Consequently, in this section, I make explicit my research process, and I reflect on my positioned engagement with this research project and with my research subjects.

This ethnographic study is part of approximately 10 years of active engagement with migrant groups and self-identified sex workers, principally through human rights projects and, in the case of migrants, previous investigations. The decision to select Colombian and Peruvian migrant women as my group of study was based on different reasons. First, Colombians and Peruvians, in general, represent nearly 70% of the total number of migrants moving into Ecuador in recent years. Second, Colombian and especially Peruvian labour migrants in Ecuador have received limited attention by migration scholars and human rights activists; Colombian refugees have attracted much more attention and funds for academic research. Third, Colombian and Peruvian women moving across Ecuadorian borders were initially depicted as passive "followers" (Larrea 2007) or "refugee mothers" (Engel 2004) and, more recently, as victims of multiples abuses, especially sexual violence; this has overlooked their role as autonomous and active migrants.

My initial objective was to study the situation of Colombian women engaged in the sex industry of the northern Ecuadorian border (in the city of Lago Agrio) and Peruvian women in the southern border (Machala). During a visit to Machala, however, I learned that Peruvians and Colombians were both involved in the sex sector of that city, but I realized that establishing contact with these migrants would not be easy. Consequently, I decided to concentrate my energies on investigating migrant experiences in the southern border province of El Oro, where I had contacts with sex workers organizations and a local NGO working on sexuality and human rights issues.

Aware that my research depended on my access to and trustful relationships with Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex sector, and afraid that, despite my Ecuadorian origin, my knowledge of the southern border was too limited, I decided to leave my own city of origin, Quito, and move to Machala, capital of El Oro. I lived in this province for four years, nearly two of them dedicated to fieldwork: 2006-2007, 2008-2009, and the first months of 2010.

The choice to develop a methodology that aimed to collect the stories and narratives of migrant women in the sex industry assumed that an inter-subjective relationship between the research subject and the researcher will be constructed. Therefore, minimizing hierarchical relations between the two was indispensable, especially if we take into account that low-income migrants in the sex sector are all too often spoken for and objectified, even by social agents intending to "rescue" them or "do something about prostitution," as Agustín (2007) claims. But how to do this? I considered two aspects to be indispensable: first, approach women in the sex industry as subjects and protagonists of their migration process and not as passive victims in need of saving; second, avoid the "imposition effect" (Bourdieu 1993), in which researchers ignore people's arguments and concerns and instead impose their own interests, values, and preconceptions.

From the beginning, the research project was designed to approach the subject of migrant women in the sex trade comprehensively, paying attention to and accompanying these migrants in both their labor and their non-labor environments. In this way, I intended to portray these women as social actors—migrants, workers, mothers, daughters, partners, etc.—instead of reducing their existence to their sexual practices and thus transforming them exclusively into sexual actors. My purpose was also to open up "discursive spaces" where this group of migrants could talk about their own experiences, arguments, and perceptions, pointing out their priorities and concerns. Already in the fieldwork site, however, the difficulties of contacting and establishing trustful relationships with migrant women in the sex trade became apparent.

During the time of my fieldwork, there were no official regulations impeding the presence of female visitors in brothels and nightclubs; nonetheless, women who were not directly involved in these sex businesses, like myself, were often advised to leave because they could be confused with sex workers and then cause problems with local health authorities, who are in charge of controlling sex workers' required documentation. Therefore, my relationship with organized

Ecuadorian sex workers and especially former leaders of sex workers' organizations was of invaluable support during my fieldwork for different reasons. In the first place, these women worked with me as research assistants and helped me to get access to formal and informal spaces of the local sex industry, where they had former clients and co-workers that I interviewed. Secondly, these women offered me important information about the local sex sector and familiarized me with the jargon, views, and interests of many sex workers.

I made my initial contact with working-class Colombian and Peruvian women engaged in the sex industry through visits to sex businesses and to local health centers, where women offering sexual services pass monthly medical check-ups. Despite the fact that I was being accompanied by other women who offered sexual services, the migrants I contacted usually expressed distrust. I realized that my nationality and my position as a middle-class academic researcher, who was posing questions and probably intruding in their lives, generated suspicion and created barriers.

In contrast, my position as an activist involved in migrants' and sex workers' rights projects made the women I attempted to contact curious to get to know me. From this position, I was passing on information that came up from my participation in a local network dealing with migration issues[16] and my collaboration with local initiatives regarding sex workers' health and empowerment.[17] At a certain point, some Colombian and Peruvian women expressed their interest to meet in order to get information, share their problems, or ask for assistance (usually on regularization procedures). This is how I initiated a close and collaborative relationship with many Colombians and Peruvians in the sex trade while connecting activism with academic research, as I explain below.

Hence, spending an extended period of time dedicated to fieldwork as well as my position as a human rights activist helped me construct trustful relationships with my research subjects and thus better approach and understand their daily life experiences. The time I spent in El Oro was particularly important because it allowed me to recognize the changing opinions, arguments, and feelings my

informants had about their life and work in Ecuador. Furthermore, being in the field for an extended period of time uncovered the misinformation, and in some cases lies, of some of my informants.

Indeed, in November 2006, six months after I contacted Piedad in a brothel of Machala, having had several informal conversations with her and even a formal, recorded interview, she asked me to come to her place because she wanted to discuss an "issue" with me. After chatting for a while, I reminded her about why she had invited me to her place. Piedad held her head in her hands and said: "*es que te mentí bien feo, discúlpame*, *es que todavía no te tenía mucha confianza*" (I lied to you, badly, forgive me, it was because I didn't trust you enough yet). Listening to this confession, I thought that it was understandable that migrants with an irregular migration status and involved in activities that are criminalized would prefer not to disclose personal and delicate information because they never know for sure how this information is going to be used.

Hence, in order to protect the privacy and security of my informants, I have changed all their names (including their working names), and I have avoided mentioning the places where they work. Similarly, I decided not to disclose intimate information that can only serve to nourish some readers' erotic curiosity or to reproduce sensationalistic stories about migrants in the sex trade. I also kept private some delicate information about migrants' strategies in Ecuador and about daily life in border regions because I am aware that this information could serve to further the surveillance practices that already exist and affect women in the sex trade and border populations. As De Genova (2002: 422) says in relation to some anthropological studies on undocumented migrations:

> The familiar pitfalls by which ethnographic objectification becomes a kind of anthropological pornography—showing it just to show it, as it were—become infinitely more complicated here by the danger that ethnographic disclosure can quite literally become a kind of surveillance, effectively complicit with if not altogether in the service of the state.

During my fieldwork in El Oro I had informal conversations with around 80 Colombian and Peruvian women engaged in different forms of commercial sex and eroticized services, but I established closer and longer term relationships with 35 of them (16 Colombians and 19 Peruvians). Their stories form the basis of this dissertation. These migrants were between 19 and 43 years old, single, separated, and (in a smaller proportion) married, with children and without them, principally with low and medium educational attainment. Thirty-two of these migrants were *mestizas* (mix race) and three were of African descent. They arrived to Ecuador mainly between 2001 and 2006 (three Colombians arrived to the country before 2000). Only one Colombian formally applied for refugee status in Ecuador, but her application was denied. Although I examine the experiences of two national groups, my interest is not to present a comparative study but rather to highlight the heterogeneity in these migration processes. Therefore, throughout this thesis I will explain some commonalities and differences between and among Peruvian and Colombian migrant women.

Apart from accompanying Colombian and Peruvian women in labor and non-labor spaces, my ethnographic work included semi-structured interviews with these migrants. I also employed participant observation in El Oro's sex and erotic businesses, and interviews with brothel, nightclub, and barra-bar owners, managers, and clients. Additionally, I interviewed local authorities and border populations in Machala, Puerto Bolivar and Huaquillas, on the Ecuadorian side of the border. In 2009, I made a month-long trip to Peru, where I interviewed local authorities in Tumbes and Piura, and I contacted one of my informants and her family.

Crossing boundaries: scholarship and activism

My position as a human rights activist not only helped me establish trustful relationships with my research subjects, as I explained above, but it also confronted me with multiple difficult questions—theoretical, methodological and especially

political—that influenced the analysis and writing of this dissertation. Indeed, during my research process I was constantly confronted with the dilemma of crossing boundaries between academic work and political activism. Numerous field notes I wrote during my ethnographic work in El Oro contain questions related to the "usefulness" of my academic research, and they usually refer to daily life problems experienced by my informants—such as detentions, deportations, abusive migration controls, and mistreatments connected to the unprotected working conditions of the sex sector—and their need for rapid and practical solutions. I was tempted to intervene in some of these cases, and many times I did, but this did not alleviate my questions regarding the role of academia in relation to social change and social justice.

My initial fears about crossing the boundary between scholarship and activism were influenced by common ideas about the necessary distance researchers should maintain in relation to research subjects, as a way to achieve an impartial and thus more thoughtful analysis. Although these ideas have been challenged in nearly 40 years of literature (see for example Rosaldo 2000; Harding 1993; Haraway 1988 and Clifford 1983), I still felt that I could be judged as "too involved" to be a good academic or to "too theoretical" to be a good activist. But together with these ideas, I was also influenced by many feminist scholars that situate women's conditions and the social, economic, political, and cultural systems of gender that affect their lives in the center of politically engaged and reflexive work, putting emphasis on praxis, or the linking of theory and practice.[18] This latter position ultimately prevailed.

In order to bring scholarship and activism together, I first thought of engaging in "activist (or action) research," and I even attended a course on this subject. I soon realized, however, that this approach was not suitable for a research project like mine. According to some authors, activist research requires the alignment and active participation of an organized group in struggle (Hale 2001). For several reasons, my research subjects were not interested in participating in any

organized political struggle. Due to their (in most cases) irregular migration status and the stigmatized nature of their work, they preferred to remain invisible, and engaging in a political struggle meant visibilizing their presence as migrants and sex workers; additionally, these migrants were focused on finding working opportunities to send money back home or save as much as possible. Yet Colombians and Peruvians engaged in the Ecuadorian sex industry were interested in changing the daily life discourses and practices that stigmatized, excluded, and discriminated against them, and I guess that is why they agreed to tell their stories.

Therefore, I finally turned to what Routledge (1996) defines as a "critical engagement" that "strives to work both within the academy and outside it," and to "live theory as a series of practices" (p. 403) in the immediacy of everyday life. For this author, the encounters between academia and activism require a "third space" that will allow for the locations of these two sites to be negotiated, a space where each of them informs and learns from the other, thus interweaving the roles of activist and academic in a meaningful way. In other words, "critical engagement" refers to a "situation of critical thought," action-oriented and "engaged with the claims, goals and actions of social movements" (p. 406). In practice, this meant two parallel processes for me.

On the one hand, I used information obtained as part of my research to collaborate with different initiatives that took place outside of academia and involved Machala-based Peruvian and Colombian migrants' organizations and Ecuadorian sex workers' associations. These initiatives called for a human rights-based approach to policies regarding migrants and sex workers, in order to eliminate abusive and discriminatory practices against these groups.[19] On the other hand, my political affinity and engagement with migrants' and sex workers' rights struggles influenced my academic work and this PhD thesis in particular. This influence was articulated in different ways.

First, through a politically engaged ethnographic work my research starts from the lived experiences of those who have been left out of the knowledge production process: migrant women in the sex industry (the central focus of this

study) and border populations. This does not mean that I escape from the power/knowledge nexus that marks academic work. Following Routledge, my intention is to "deconstruct the barrier between the academy [sometimes distant and politically detached[20]] and the lives of the people it professes to represent, so that scholarly work interprets and effects social change" (1996: 400). To do so, I examine daily life experiences of domination, struggle, and resistance, and I highlight the structural processes and local-global power relations that contour everyday life, conscious that this endeavor has both theoretical and political implications. As some feminist scholars have noticed, women's stories in general, and migrants' stories in particular, carry theoretical potential: by focusing on "real people" and stressing nuances and ambivalences, these stories—which are heterogeneous and hold multiples voices—question abstract analyses and static theoretical categories (Lawson 2000). Further, women's daily life stories introduce the element of time and break coherence, and therefore they "train our gaze on flux and contradiction," suggesting that "others live as we perceive ourselves living—not as automatons programmed according to 'cultural' rules or acting out social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, … enduring tragic personal loses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter" (Abu-Lughod 1993: 27).

Secondly, my interest in action and policy-oriented research made me write not only for academics but for a broader audience, such as policy makers, national and local authorities, and civil society organizations working with issues of migration, borders, and sexual commerce. For this reason, I use language that makes theory accessible to those outside the academy. Thirdly, my concluding chapter includes political and some policy-oriented reflections in relation to migrant women involved in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations. These reflections are intended to contribute to changing ideas of how these women are envisioned and represented in society at large, as well as within debates on human rights, women workers' rights, and migrants' rights.

Chapter overview

In summary, this dissertation brings together migration, sexuality, and border literature to study the experiences, social representations, and self-accounts of Colombian and Peruvian women engaged in different intimate-material relations in the Ecuadorian province of El Oro. To look more integrally at the experiences of these women, I approach them as migrants not as sex workers, and I look at the interplays of structure, discourse, and agency. I explain the ways in which socioeconomic and political forces, and the discourses that construct migrants in the sex trade as exotic figures, sexual threats, or sex trafficking victims inform the migration experiences of these women. Simultaneously, I illustrate how migrant women themselves talk and feel about their migration processes and erotic experiences, and how they respond to the structural constraints and the rigid sexual categorizations imposed on them. The narratives and lived experiences of these migrants show how working-class women navigate borders and boundaries, and how they bring together intimacy and material transactions in order to negotiate their subordination and accomplish their migration projects.

The chapters of this thesis are organized as follows. Chapters 1 and 2 provide the political and economic context of the El Oro province. In chapter 1, "The Ecuador–Peru border: contact and tension, brotherhood rhetoric, and new distinctions," I explain how recent economic and political transformations in this border region stimulate new cross-border flows and, simultaneously, new tensions and divisions. Focusing on Ecuadorian border populations' discourses and perceptions in relation to migrant workers from Peru and Colombia, this chapter emphasizes the role national origin plays in stressing divisions between people that are geographically and culturally close, and it shows how the sexualization of nationality reinforces differences and hierarchies between "national" and "foreign" women.

Chapter 2, "Global flows and the local sex industry," explores the links between sexual commerce and patterns of economic development, and it examines

the role of migrant women in sustaining this industry. Challenging ideas about sexual commerce as solely sustained by criminal organizations, I explain how the growth of El Oro's sex industry is connected to global flows of capital, goods, people, and ideas, as well as to a permanent demand for and rotation of women offering sexual and erotic services. I argue that the sex industry constitutes an "alternative circuit for survival" for those excluded from economic globalization.

Chapter 3, "Moving women: intra-regional migrations and female sexuality," explicates the particularities of intra-regional migrations within the global South and the role that sexuality plays in the different stages of these migration movements. It illustrates how particular constructions of sexuality intersect with gendered and national origin stereotypes, influencing the experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador, such as decisions to migrate, labor recruitment and incorporation, integration in host country, and transnational family relationships.

Chapter 4, "Sexual concerns and migration controls," focuses on the fears and anxieties that the presence of migrant women in the local sex trade provokes among Ecuadorians, and it analyses the ways in which they encourage the adoption of restrictive migration regulations and tighter controls of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in general, and of this group of women in particular. The main argument of this chapter is that migration control intersects with the regulation of sexuality in a manner that reproduces exclusionary forms of citizenship, and territorial power.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on migrants' subjective experiences and self-accounts, and they show how commercial sex and intimacy more broadly are connected to migration. Chapter 5, "Struggling over the meanings of sexual commerce," explores migrant women's subjective experiences in the sex industry and their own accounts and definitions of the sexual and eroticized services they engage in. This chapter has two purposes: first, to explain the ways in which Colombians' and Peruvians' experiences and meanings of commercial sex and other intimate-material relations are informed and transformed by their

socioeconomic position and the context of migration; second, to illustrate how these subjective experiences and meanings both depart from and contest hegemonic understandings of sexual commerce.

Chapter 6, "Blurring the boundaries: commodifying intimacy, romanticizing commercial sex," examines the connections between intimate encounters and economic exchanges not only in the public spaces of the sex industry but also in private places and daily life interactions. The informal, sporadic, and ambiguous relationships migrants engage in contest overly binary models of private-public, intimate-impersonal, paid sex-free sex, and they show how these women rely on intimate, friendly, and affective relations in order to access resources and confront daily life hardships, including migration restrictions, and to integrate in Ecuador.

Finally, I conclude by "Rethinking sexual commerce and female intra-regional migrations." In this last section I put together the main findings of this dissertation. I also highlight some potential contributions this work can offer to studies regarding the nexus between migration, sexuality, and borders, and to public policies directed at intra-regional migrant women in the sex industry from a critical human rights perspective.

CHAPTER 1

THE ECUADOR–PERU BORDER: CONTACT AND TENSION, BROTHERHOOD RHETORIC AND NEW DISTINCTIONS

> …borders not only join what is different but also divide what is similar.
>
> —Willem van Schendel (2005: 9)

> In many border settings, sex seems to provide a ready analogy for many of the features typical of relationships across state lines and along their edges.
>
> —Wilson and Donnan (1998: 143)

At noon, the small bridge (100 meters long by 40 meters wide) that separates the border cities of Huaquillas (Ecuador) and Aguas Verdes (Peru) looks like an open market. Street vendors offer clothes, food, and beverages to passers-by, while cross-border traders push their rickshaws full of merchandise from one side to the other. Under colorful parasols, money changers holding black briefcases wait for clients with U.S. dollars (Ecuador's currency) and Peruvian soles. Cars and motorcycles also cram this international bridge, where movement never stops since this border crossing point is open permanently.

The border between Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes, in the coastal region of southern Ecuador and northern Peru, is *una frontera viva* (an animated or "alive" border area), as it is often called. Surrounded by shops, restaurants, and hotels, and very close to residential areas, the circulation of people and transports across the international bridge, although backed up at rush hours, has no obstacles because control posts are located a few kilometers inside each country's border.

This populated border is rather different from other border crossings in South America. The latter usually close during the night and clearly separate two

neighboring countries by means of border compounds (the so-called *complejos fronterizos*) and checkpoints. In this lively and often overcrowded border point, two signs, one on each side of the bridge, are the only markers of the boundary between Ecuador and Peru.

People in Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes cross the international bridge whenever they want to take advantage of price, wage, and service differences. Thus, it is common to see Ecuadorians crossing to Aguas Verdes to shop and have lunch, and Peruvians going to Huaquillas to sell their products or look for medical services, as the nearest hospital on the Peruvian side is 25 kilometers away (in the city of Tumbes). Linguistic and cultural proximity between Ecuadorians and Peruvians facilitates contact across this border.

Figure 1. International bridge connecting Huaquillas (Ecuador) and Aguas Verdes (Peru)

Standing at this open and interconnected border, it is hard to imagine that this region was affected by a long territorial dispute originating in the early 19th century, when Ecuador and Peru became independent states, and ending only recently in 1998.[1] It is equally hard to imagine that behind the close day-to-day

contact between border populations and the integration agreements recently adopted by the governments of both countries, new tensions are emerging in this border area. These tensions are no longer related to territorial disputes, but rather to the continually increasing movement of people and goods across a border that is often considered too "lax," "chaotic," and "permeable."

Based on my ethnographic work in El Oro and especially my visits to the border city of Huaquillas, in this chapter I question static and self-evident notions of borders, which are often seen as strict barriers or divisions that are disappearing with globalization and regionalization. I explain that the Ecuador–Peru border is going through a process of change and redefinition that comprises measures to advance integration and facilitate cross-border circulation while simultaneously enforcing new controls and reinforcing notions of difference. Thus, contact and tension, alliance and conflict are part of daily life at this border. My analysis focuses on the local meanings and discourses about the Ecuador–Peru border, and the perceptions Ecuadorian border populations have in relation to Peruvian and Colombian workers arriving in El Oro. It explains how the intersection of nationality and sexuality serves to stress divisions and hierarchies between people that are geographically close and share similar cultural, class, and ethnic backgrounds.

The work of Alejandro Grimson (2000a, 2000b) is particularly useful to critically examine border narratives and border practices in contemporary Latin America. Without rejecting the multiple and longstanding connections in border territories in this part of the world, Grimson questions the essentialist and romantic narratives of borders currently emerging in regional integration contexts. These narratives emphasize the "eternal brotherhood of Latin American peoples" while downplaying the role of territorial borders and national boundaries. Following the work of anthropologist Fredrik Barth, Grimson argues that the limits and distinctions between ethnic (and I would add other social) groups persist despite contact and movement between them. These distinctions are not essential but rather

contextually constructed (self-defined or defined by others). Moreover, they "do not depend on the absence of mobility, contact, and information; rather, they entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained" (Barth, quoted in Grimson 2000a: 19-20, translation from Spanish is mine).[2]

The above reflection rejects the notion of regionalization as a process of homogenization as well as the idea that geographic and social isolation are central elements for maintaining cultural differentiation. As Grimson asserts, it is through practices of interaction that distinctions are built and tensions are developed. The author emphasizes these tensions as a way to analytically complicate the borderless imagery attached to so-called "brother countries" and to identify the power relations that affect and restrain regional integration projects.

My contribution to Grimson's work is to introduce sexuality and gender to the analysis of borders in regional integration contexts. I will show that women coming from "the other side" of the border and identified as "foreigners" are exoticized and eroticized and then included in the border geography of El Oro in very specific ways. Further, these "foreign bodies" and the sexual behavior attributed to them not only reinforce differences and hierarchies between "national" and "non-national" women; they also symbolize "many of the features typical of relations across state lines," as Wilson and Donnan's (1999) phrase at the beginning of this chapter states. This means that sexualized Colombian and Peruvian women in El Oro attract, seduce, and motivate close contact, but they also fuel the fears and anxieties provoked by the rapid changes in the Ecuador–Peru border.

I will start with a brief historical overview of the Ecuador–Peru border. Then I will situate the changing political and economic context in which new alliances and tensions develop.

From border conflict to integration agreements

Ecuadorian–Peruvian territorial dispute was one of the longest continuing border conflicts in the western hemisphere (Palmer 1997), and it included several armed events. One of these events was the *Batalla de Zarumilla*, which occurred in 1941 and ended with the temporary occupation of the Ecuadorian provinces of El Oro and Loja by the Peruvian military. A few months after this battle, Ecuador and Peru signed the treaty of "Peace, Friendship and Boundaries" known as the Rio Protocol. The two countries, however, had opposing views about this treaty: for Peruvians, the Rio Protocol established clear and definitive borders between Ecuador and Peru, putting the territorial issue to rest; for Ecuadorians, the treaty settled an "invalid border" that blocked Ecuador's access to the Amazon River. Consequently, territorial disputes between the two nations persisted until the late 1990s.

As a result of this long and conflictive period, political, social, and economic relations between Ecuador and Peru were shaped by mistrust and mutual negative perceptions (see for example Palmer 2009). This territorial dispute also shaped the national identity of Ecuadorians in relation to Peruvians and vice-versa (Radcliffe 1998; Griesse et al. 2002).

Yet in border regions, relations between Ecuadorians and Peruvians in times of increased tensions were shaped by more ambiguous sentiments; they combined familiarity and suspicion, contact and tension. In all likelihood, this ambiguity was due to the fact that the northern region of Peru and the southern region of Ecuador have historically been linked by social, cultural, and economic networks (Aldana 1991, 1999). In fact, some of the Peruvian women I interviewed in El Oro cities had relatives who were born in Ecuador or family members involved in old migration processes into this country; their stories demonstrate the historical patterns of cross-border mobility and labor in this and other border areas of the Andean sub-region (Torales et al. 2003). Concurrently, the process of nation

building and the long territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru had concrete effects on this border region as well as on the subjectivities of border populations, especially in zones where armed clashes took place. Therefore, people on both sides of the border were (and they still are) caught between national belonging and regional attachment, as Aldana (1999) explains. Border people's narratives illustrate this situation.

Inhabitants of Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes explained that in the period of the territorial conflict, *el fantasma de la guerra* (the specter of war) haunted the daily life of borderland inhabitants and hindered investment and development in border cities. During this time, the border was filled with landmines, and military presence in the region was constant. However, people living in this area remember that there was continual contact with inhabitants of the neighboring country despite barriers and controls. Human movements and trade between Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes never stopped. A Peruvian cross-border trader recalled that throughout the "war epoch" a chain was used to close the border from six in the afternoon to six in the morning, officially closing the border until the next morning. But a certain degree of flexibility always existed: "if my family and I wanted to visit friends or have dinner on the other side, we had to ask the authority for permission and he would let us cross, but only by foot because cars were not allowed through."[3] This merchant also explained that many Peruvian children living in the small town of Aguas Verdes (including his own child) crossed the border to study in Huaquillas because this was closer and cheaper than traveling to the Peruvian city of Tumbes.

Ecuadorians in Huaquillas told similar (and occasionally bizarre) stories about the border in times of conflict. When the border was closed due to tensions between Peruvian and Ecuadorian armed forces, traders would stand on both banks of the Zarumilla river—under the international bridge—and barter their products by shouting at each other or throwing written messages across the narrow river. They also recalled that Peruvians used to cross the border daily to shop and look for entertainment in the bars and brothels of Huaquillas because, at the time, prices were cheaper on that side of the border.

Despite the close day-to-day contact, which included friendship and camaraderie as well as trans-national marriages, cross-border relations were not devoid of mistrust or even danger. "I saw how cows and people approaching the border line blew up after stepping on a mine," a traders' leader of Huaquillas recalled.[4] Others remembered that people crossing the border were sometimes accused of being "spies" or had other negative images attached to them. "We called Peruvians *gallinas* [chickens] and they called us *monos* [monkeys]. These epithets were hurled at each other during quarrels between civilians," said a journalist living in Huaquillas.[5]

But border narratives are not only framed in terms of national origin. Gender and sexuality are key and overlapping elements in discourses about national and regional identities at the border, and in the imageries of "own" and "other" men and women (Vila 2003a; Caggiano 2007). Further, sexuality is often referred to as a "dangerous" element in the border as it is a signifier of the violent occupation of national boundaries, especially in times of conflict. Thus, in El Oro, the long territorial dispute with Peru is constantly brought into memory through paintings and monuments that highlight masculinity and memorialize "courageous soldiers" as central figures of regional history. Likewise, the people I interviewed on the Ecuadorian side of the border recounted heroic stories in which men were portrayed as defenders of the homeland and its people. These stories repeatedly underlined that during armed clashes and periods of alert, "women and children were sent away while men stayed to protect the territory." In these accounts, women were depicted not only as vulnerable to "enemy abuses" such as rape but also as passive subjects in the history of the region and the building of the nation.

In what follows, I show that although in times of peace imageries of and perceptions about those coming from the "other side" are still influenced by past experiences, these mental images are recreated by a new political-economic context. Sexuality, gender, and nation overlap in these new images about the "others."

Peace and free transit

In October 1998, after several months of negotiation, the presidents of Ecuador and Peru signed the "Itamaraty Peace Accord," putting the territorial dispute between the two countries to a definitive end. A couple of months later, the chain that used to block the Huaquillas-Aguas Verdes international bridge was removed for good and the border was kept open permanently.

The purpose of the Ecuador–Peru peace accord was not only to settle territorial limits agreed on by the two parties but also to encourage new relationships aimed at advancing integration, bilateral cooperation, and development in border regions (Chiriboga 2009). Therefore, the "global peace accord" included several treaties in the areas of commerce as well as bilateral and trans-border integration. Two of these treaties were the Agreement on Acceleration and Deepening of Free Trade, and the Integration, Development, and Neighborhood Accord. The first one was intended to lift import duties in bilateral commerce in the short term. The second treaty proposed the creation of a cross-border regime, and it established guidelines to facilitate the circulation of transport, goods, and people between the two countries. As part of this accord, "free transit zones" were established at official border crossing points. In El Oro, for example, the free transit zone covers the border towns of Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes, where the movement of people is not subjected to document checkpoints or migration control.[6]

The integration treaties adopted by Ecuador and Peru as part of the peace accord concurred with a series of integration agreements adopted by the Community of Andean Nations (CAN). Since the 1980s CAN (known initially as the Andean Group), enacted a series of accords intended to reinforce the process of integration, principally through the conformation of a common market and a free trade area.[7] More recently, this integration process has incorporated social and cultural aspects, including migration issues (Martínez and Stang 2006), and it has paid more attention to integration at border areas. Therefore, CAN has proposed

the creation of *Zonas de Integración Fronteriza* (Border Integration Regimes), where free circulation of persons, vehicles, goods, and services is promoted (CAN 2001a, Decision # 501). Likewise, different agreements to harmonize and simplify migration and customs procedures have been adopted (CAN 2001b, 2003).

Although CAN's social agenda is still marginal, and the decisions adopted by this regional organism in relation to migration and labor have not been fully implemented (see Araujo and Eguiguren 2009), some of these agreements have been applied. For instance, in the early 2000s, measures were established to simplify the travel documents required to move across the Andean sub-region. In practice, this means passports are no longer required to move between neighboring countries within the Andean sub-region and that the safe-conduct that was mandatory until 1998 to move to inner cities of Ecuador and Peru border provinces (such as Machala, in El Oro) has been eliminated. Currently, Andean citizens moving to neighboring countries are only required to carry an identity card and fill in a short form, the *Tarjeta Andina de Migración* (Andean Migration Card), which is the only document used for migration control. Tourist visas were also eliminated in this sub-region. In this way, the "de facto process of integration" between South American countries (Martínez and Stang 2006) was formalized through bilateral and multilateral integration agreements.

Certainly, integration accords have not only facilitated but also increased movement in Ecuadorian border regions. Some studies estimate that, between 1998 and 2008, the circulation of people in the Ecuador–Peru border increased four-fold, while the circulation of vehicles by the Huaquillas-Aguas Verdes international bridge increased five-fold in the same period (Cornejo 2009). Nonetheless, as I explain in chapter 4, the right to travel freely within the Andean sub-region does not necessarily translate to rights to reside and work in a neighboring country.

Brotherhood rhetoric and borderless imagery

Academics and other analysts writing from Lima, Quito, and other central cities tend to be very optimistic about the social and economic consequences of the Ecuador–Peru peace accord and its constituent treaties, although they focus on bilateral relations between these two countries and not necessarily on their cross-border relations (see the articles in Donoso 2009). In these analyses, the remarkable growth of bilateral trade between Ecuador and Peru[8] is usually highlighted as a sign of integration and of the end of distrustful relations (Carrión 2011). If we consider that Peru is currently Ecuador's third largest trading partner (behind the United States and Colombia), we have to acknowledge that relations between these two countries are definitely more fluid. Nevertheless, a dynamic bilateral trade between two states does not necessarily equal fluid day-to-day relations—social, cultural, and economic—between the inhabitants of border regions.

Diplomats are even more optimistic about the consequences of the peace accord and the integration agreements adopted by Ecuador and Peru. According to diplomatic discourse, mistrust between Ecuadorians and Peruvians is a thing of the past. Peace and integration, they say, has permitted these two nations to see themselves as "genuine brothers" (Ayala Lasso 2009: 68) sharing a common history and a common future. Furthermore, the opinion of a Peruvian diplomat illustrates that regional integration is often perceived as the end of borders and boundaries:

> As a result of the peace agreement, integration is increasing, and now there are practically no borders between Ecuador and Peru. There are no distinctions between us, we are similar; not even in the dialect can you notice differences between Ecuadorians and Peruvians.[9]

Integrationist and fraternal discourses are also common in the border province of El Oro. Here, references about the "shared culture and customs" of Peruvians and

Ecuadorians and the "fraternal links" that unite border populations are constantly repeated in trans-border public events.

A public speech made by the mayor of Huaquillas during the eleventh anniversary of the Ecuador–Peru peace accord reveals, once again, that regionalization and the rhetoric of brotherhood are used to support the idea that national borders are disappearing:

> It is important that these two brother countries continue strengthening peace in order to keep moving towards the Latin American unity goal that Simón Bolívar[10] proposed; the unity of brother countries where barriers do not exist, where there are no division lines.[11]

A far cry from public discourses and diplomatic rhetoric, however, integration between and day-to-day relations across border territories are not only complex and conflictive but also contradictory. As various ethnographic studies in border regions have pointed out, close contact leads to strong alliances, but it leads to strong tensions as well. Grimson and Vila (2002: 81) argue that political and academic discourse regarding regional integration agreements tends to put an excessive emphasis on the non-existence of borders and boundaries for border populations, "losing sight of the concrete effects that processes of nationalization and nationalistic policies have had upon the construction of peoples' subjectivities over time." These and other authors also highlight that in spite of the ever-increasing economic, social, and cultural practices that transcend national borders, "the role the state continues to play in the everyday lives of its own and other citizens" should not be underestimated (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 2).

This means that integration processes are not linear. Rather, they reveal instances of progress and regress that tend to be guided by specific political conjunctures (Martínez and Stang 2006). For ethnographers working at South American borders, the economic and political changes taking place in border regions serve as a new framework through which new alliances and conflicts

develop. Therefore, the opening of bridges and new crossing points in border towns, in order to "modernize" commercial relations and advance regional integration, can bring about unwanted consequences and motivate tensions on both sides of the border. Moreover, as regionalization processes do not necessarily eliminate price or tax differences between neighboring countries, competing interests persist; this can generate conflictive relations that are often expressed in nationalist terms (Grimson 2000b).

The above considerations reflect some of the features that currently characterize the Ecuador–Peru border. Here, relatively recent political and economic processes have altered the dynamics of this border region, provoking multiple anxieties among border populations. The presence of Peruvians and Colombians in Ecuador's southern border, as a result of free transit agreements and the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy, have fuelled these anxieties further, and they have influenced understandings of the border as a site of contact and integration and simultaneously one of turmoil and "invasion." In what follows, I focus on the mental images different actors at the border construct about their Peruvian and Colombian neighbors, and I show how these images are linked to a sense of crisis provoked by economic and political transformations and the supposed risks of open borders.

(Re)imagining the neighbors in a new political-economic context

Current representations of Colombians and Peruvians in Ecuador are not homogeneous. Two contrasting discourses delineate representations of these groups. First, as mentioned before, is the rhetoric of "brotherhood," which is sustained not only by politicians and diplomats but also by some civil society organizations that defend the ideals of Latin American integration and encourage a rights-based approach in migration policies directed at citizens of "brother countries." The second discourse, which is present simultaneously, depicts Colombians and Peruvians as "threatening" and their arrival to Ecuador as a

"problem" with direct consequences for the labor market and national security. Negative media coverage and public declarations by some national authorities have shaped this perception, which often obscures the discourse of brotherhood. For instance, in 2003 the president of Ecuador Lucio Gutiérrez declared that "immigrants [coming from Peru and Colombia] take away jobs from Ecuadorians," especially in El Oro.[12]

Local newspapers have been particularly dramatic about the supposed threats that labor migrants pose to Ecuadorians' well-being. The following excerpt illustrates the fears often expressed in 2004, when migration flows into El Oro were at their highest:

> …the province of El Oro is confronting a social problem that has driven its society to a real economic collapse. In addition, it has influenced the scandalous growth of delinquency, drug trafficking and consumption, prostitution, fraud, and other activities at odds with morality …. Going around the capital of this province and other cantons, it is easy to recognize that Colombians', Peruvians', and Asians' migration [into the province] is astonishing; ninety nine per cent of them do not have documents, and they work in banana plantations, in agriculture, construction, and in the case of women, mostly in brothels, barras-bar, cabarets, restaurants. That is to say, [migrants] have taken Ecuadorians' jobs because their labor is considered cheaper, [but] there is no control of this issue. Day after day migrants keep coming as tourists; they complete a work week and then go back to their countries with the dollars they have earned, in the case of Peruvians and Colombians taking away an important sum of circulating money from El Oro's economy.[13]

Hence, a causal connection is made between labor migrations to El Oro and social, economic, and even moral problems in the province. Furthermore, different local problems, such as delinquency, unemployment, goods smuggling, and the recent economic crisis that has affected the province, are attributed to individuals coming from neighboring countries, especially undocumented migrants. It is worth noting that although other migrant groups have arrived in El Oro in recent years (Chinese migrants for example), stigmatization, accusations, and protests have been principally directed against Colombian and especially Peruvian citizens.[14] These

migrants have been constructed as economically deprived groups or *migrantes chiros* (poor or penniless migrants) who "take dollars away" instead of "investing" money in Ecuador. In this way, differences between "nationals" and "foreigners" from Peru and Colombia are accentuated, and Ecuador is presented as being better-off than its neighbors. This occurs despite the fact that socioeconomic and income differences between Andean countries are actually minimal, a situation that has not really changed with the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy.[15]

The quote presented above also reveals the ways in which Ecuadorian media connect trans-border migrations with prostitution, an activity that, in turn, is associated with criminal activities and other social problems. Thus, it is not only the nationality or the "foreignness" of Colombian and Peruvian migrants that is stressed by border populations as a way to create distinctions between members and non-members of the Ecuadorian nation-state. Sexuality, and more specifically sexual behavior, is another axis of differentiation that, connected to gender, emphasizes divisions and hierarchies between national and non-national women, as I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

When I started my ethnographic research in El Oro, in 2006, discourses about trans-border migrations and trans-border migrants were not as dramatic as they had been in previous years. Yet locals perceived these migration flows in essentially negative terms. The permanent opening of the Ecuador–Peru border in October 1998 and the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy only fourteen months later were seen as two events that transformed the province and stimulated the arrival of Peruvian and Colombian migrants bringing different social problems.

According to the president of the Huaquillas Chamber of Commerce, the opening of the Ecuador–Peru border certainly increased commerce between these two countries; but it also sparked an "invasion" of Peruvian products and people in Ecuadorian border regions. Moreover, this local actor argued that the peace accord and its commercial treaties "primarily benefitted the big industries of central cities, not small traders in border areas."[16] To explain this, he claimed that nowadays, with an open border, Peruvian dealers find it easier and cheaper to buy directly

from wholesalers in large and central Ecuadorian cities. Consequently, cross-border trade, which is the main source of income for most of the inhabitants of Huaquillas, has actually shrunk significantly, in contrast to the important growth of bilateral trade.[17]

Other inhabitants of Huaquillas put more emphasis on the negative consequences of dollarization on the local economy. For some borderland inhabitants, these consequences can be explained by an important increase of local prices and thus the loss of competitiveness brought about by the adoption of a strong currency like the U.S. dollar and its impact on border towns that largely depend on border commerce (similar analyses have been made by some academics and also national authorities[18]). In daily life, this means that Peruvians do not cross the border to shop and buy as much as they did before the year 2000, because prices are now higher on the Ecuadorian side of the border, while many Ecuadorians prefer to buy Peruvian products since many of them are cheaper. Similarly, numerous people stressed that dollarization was particularly "harmful" in border cities because it triggered a "flood" of labor migrants that cross the border attracted by dollarized wages. "They abuse [the open border], they don't stop coming," said a trade leader concerning Peruvian workers, and he added: "our Peruvian brothers are invading us and this is pushing Huaquillas into an economic debacle."[19] Thus, the source of Huaquillas' economic crisis is identified with the presence of trans-border labor migrants, who, in the complex and contradictory context of regional integration, are defined simultaneously as "brothers" and "invaders."

Consequently, although the opening of the Ecuador–Peru border in the late 1990s was celebrated by national and local authorities as an expression of peace, integration, and the potential for development of border territories, in daily life and popular imagery open borders are perceived with a degree of anxiety due to the "threats" (labor displacement, insecurity, criminality, etc.) they supposedly bring.[20]

The discourses of borderland communities also evince the unequal consequences of integration and economic globalization as processes that tend to benefit big traders to the detriment of small merchants and informal systems of traditional exchange. In point of fact, while national authorities and entrepreneurs in central cities emphasize the problem of "contraband" in border regions, borderland residents define this informal and small-scale trade as one of the few "survival strategies" left in a region that has historically been affected by the decisions of national authorities in Quito and Lima that ignore the reality and particular needs of border regions. These discrepancies reveal tensions between border regions and the nation.

Demanding inclusion in the nation, accentuating difference with the neighbors

The negative mental images and nationalistic rhetoric that many borderland Ecuadorians express in relation to trans-border migrants are not only reflections of intolerant and xenophobic attitudes, which are rather common in various Ecuadorian cities as recent studies have shown[21]; in El Oro, these reactions are connected to a feeling of marginalization among border populations.

It is certainly the case that since the end of the border conflict with Peru, the southern border of Ecuador receives insufficient attention from national authorities, academics, non-governmental organizations, and international cooperation. Public attention, as well as public and private economic resources, is now focused on the northern border with Colombia, which is currently Ecuador's "hot border."[22] Therefore, many people in El Oro perceive that the southern border has been relegated from state protection and development projects, despite the agreements and international funds allocated to Ecuador and Peru as part of the global peace accord.[23]

Hence, the historical dynamism of the El Oro's economy, which I will look at in chapter 2, has not benefited border towns; the 2010 national census reveals that these towns suffer from poor conditions regarding formal employment, social

security, education, and sanitation.[24] As a consequence, people in cities like Huaquillas (and Arenillas) feel socially and economically excluded. It is precisely in this context that negative discourses and exclusionary practices toward Peruvian and Colombian migrants take place, expressing internal struggles relating to material resources, citizenship rights, and national belonging. An incident I experienced during one of my visits to Huaquillas illustrates this point.

In September 2007, I found Huaquillas in a state of commotion. Petrol stations were controlled by the military, and the sale of this product—which is subsidized by the Ecuadorian state and is therefore a lot cheaper than in neighboring countries—was restricted to a few gallons per person, in order to prevent gasoline smuggling to Peru. The control measures were ordered by the central government as part of the "Energy Sovereignty Plan." Its ostensible purpose was to stop the "illegal diversion of fuel," which, according to national authorities, is causing millions of losses for the national treasury and "serious internal disturbances in the economic, energy, and social order."[25] Inhabitants of Huaquillas were unhappy with this intervention. Local carriers, who felt especially affected by fuel sale restrictions, decided to protest in the streets, and they did so by obstructing Huaquillas' main avenue. The protest was also present in a local radio station, where a broadcaster complained with a loud voice that while Huaquillas was confronting a deep economic crisis, national authorities responded with nothing but restrictions. Another one, even angrier, exclaimed: "We have neither gasoline nor diesel. This is not control, this is mistreatment! We are also Ecuadorians, we are not Peruvians! It's time for justice at the border!"[26]

In Ecuador, as well as in other South American countries, border regions have historically experienced a position of social and economic marginality in relation to their nation-states. This position seems to have been reinforced by recent economic policies that have made some border territories even more peripheral, as the articles in Grimson (2000) illustrate. Curiously, borderland inhabitants' cries to be recognized as "nationals" and hence included in the national

project often result in the emphasizing of differences with peoples from neighboring countries.

Focusing on the border between Argentina and Bolivia, Gabriela Karasik (2000) argues that in a border region that crisscrosses territories highly connected in social, cultural, and ethnic terms, ordinary people and even institutions try to eliminate ambiguities and demarcate clear divisions between "nationals" and "non-nationals." Therefore, people coming from the other side are portrayed as particularly different, as "Other," and symbolic distance is taken in relation to this group. This process of differentiation has important consequences for understandings and practices of citizenship because those who are constructed as different from nationals are also seen as unequally positioned to demand citizenship rights in the receiving state.

Karasik's work shows that low-income border crossers in particular are often the focus of local populations, as they are perceived as a "menace" to their demands of inclusion or as "competitors" for the scarce resources available in border cities, such as labor and health services (see also Caggiano 2006, 2007). Therefore, in a context of economic instability and rapid changes at local, national, and international level, "exclusionary processes of identity and citizenship are enhanced … in an attempt to take distance from those who are perceived as dangerously close," both geographically and culturally speaking (Karasik 2000: 175, translation from Spanish is mine).

The above reflections resonate with the situation along the Ecuador–Peru border. Here, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic similarities between Ecuadorians, Peruvians, and Colombians can easily confuse these three national groups. Most of the Ecuadorians and trans-border migrants living and working in El Oro are *mestizos*; thus, ethnicity and race are not generally used as markers of difference between these groups, as is usually the case in South-North migrations and even in trans-border movements in the Southern Cone of South America.

Furthermore, border populations in Ecuador and Peru feel equally affected by centralist policies and other measures adopted by national authorities, and

sometimes this stimulates cross-border alliances and social protest against central states. In February 2009, for example, cross-border traders of Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes blocked the Ecuador–Peru international bridge to protest new taxes levied by Ecuadorian government on import products. In October of the same year, border traders came together once again to protest the opening of a new, "modern," "orderly" but isolated crossing point between El Oro and Tumbes—the "Peace Bridge"—that, according to local traders, would definitively "kill" border trade in Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes.[27]

Nevertheless, similarities, alliances, and historical ties between border populations do not erase national affiliations or even nationalist discourses and practices. Differentiation from neighbors that appear "dangerously close" with an open border and free circulation agreements is accentuated in moments of tension. In those moments, border populations reaffirm their position as "nationals" and, thus, their belonging to the Ecuadorian nation-state from which they constantly feel excluded. In order to do so, Ecuadorians magnify distinctions with Peruvian and Colombians through references to dialect, clothing, physical appearance, skin color, behavior, manners, and moral conduct. In this way, they underscore the boundaries of national identity and belonging, and they even demand or legitimize controls and restrictive measures against the migrant "others."

Sexualized migrant women and fears of "penetrated" borders

What particularly caught my attention in the discourses of people in the El Oro in relation to trans-border migrations was the prominence female migrants acquired in these discourses. The presence of Colombian and Peruvian women was highlighted in local news stories and in daily life discussions about trans-border migrants in the province, and they were persistently sexualized in these depictions or directly referred to as "foreign women in prostitution."

Scholars studying daily life at the border have claimed that images and discourses of prostitution are frequently linked to border regions. For instance, Donnan and Wilson (1999) explain that border areas have been widely perceived as sites that provide opportunities for different informal and illicit activities, including commercial sex. Observing that commercial sexual activities are neither found at every border nor found only at borders, these authors suggest that the constant reference to both local and cross-border prostitution in border areas is a manifestation of a broader process: the sexualizing of borders and its symbolic connection with the human body.

Certainly, sex is a recurring element in the politics of border regions. Sex is a commodity exchanged in the local border economy, a factor held responsible for the spread of disease, or a focus for violent actions (Donnan and Wilson 1999). And this is because sex, and those bodily parts associated with it, "may be used as a means of both enacting as well as representing relationships in the wider society", as Donnan and Wilson assert (p. 129). That is to say, the sex act marks contact and alliance and simultaneously division and intrusion; therefore, it is a rhetorical device for marking boundaries and a powerful idiom of inclusion and exclusion that is mapped onto the body itself.

In this last section, my aim is to show that, in the current context of border regions, marked by integration projects and a rapid circulation of people, goods and ideas, the exoticized and sexualized bodies of "foreign women" become symbols of the connections and simultaneously of the fears provoked by open borders and free circulation agreements.

Indeed, Peruvian and especially Colombian women in Ecuador are generally exoticized and eroticized. The sexuality of these women is othered and underscored as a sign of difference from Ecuadorians or "national women." I call this process of differentiation the sexual stigmatization of national origin. It is a process in which the overlap of sexuality and nationality naturalizes differences between "nationals" and "foreigners" and creates hierarchies on the basis of perceived sexual and moral behaviors. My ethnographic work revealed that the

exoticization and sexualization of Colombian and Peruvian women encourage a whole range of imageries, sexual fantasies, and desires but also negative labels and a sexual stigma that affects these two national groups as a whole.

Many men I talked to in El Oro defined Peruvian and especially Colombian women as particularly distinct from Ecuadorians. These two group of migrants were seen as friendly and attractive, highlighting in the case of Colombian women their beauty, joyfulness and affectionateness, and in the case of Peruvian women their sociability. A conversation I had with a group of middle-aged men in Machala illustrates some of these imageries. The perceived skin color and gendered behavior of these migrants, which make Ecuadorian men feel attracted to, respected and indulged by them, are part of these imageries:

Man 1: Ecuadorian men like foreign women, especially Colombians. I think it's because Colombians are *amables* [kind] and *cariñosas* [affectionate].
Man 2: Yes, Colombians are better than Ecuadorians.
Author: Why do you think that?
Man 2. S*on rosaditas* (they are pinkish, in reference to what he perceived as a lighter skin color).
Man 3: And they treat one of *usted* [formal second person form of address] and as a man one likes to have that respect; that is a sign of respect.
Man 2: *Sí, dicen papi, mijo, usted* [Yes, they say daddy, honey, 'you' in a formal way].
Author: What about Peruvian women?
Man 2: [They're] dark, not nice, and they say *tú, tú, tú* [you, informal second person], just like Ecuadorians.
Man 1: Well, I've met some [Peruvian women] that were quite nice, sociable, and friendly.

Other Ecuadorian men describe Colombian and Peruvian women as sexually open or directly as sexually loose. The intersections of sexuality and nationality with economic position buttress these images, which portray migrant women as impoverished and thus *dispuestas a todo por poco dinero* (willing to do anything for very little money). As a man in Machala told me in relation to Peruvian women:

> Here, not every man finds Peruvian women particularly attractive. Still, [many think that it] is quite easy to be [sexually] with them because one just gives them some little thing and that's a lot for them. Twenty dollars is a lot of money for them.

Hence, despite the rhetoric of brotherhood and commonality deployed both by authorities and some ordinary people in El Oro (and other Ecuadorian provinces) to define citizens of neighboring countries as culturally and ethnically close and part of the *Patria Grande* (the big and integrated Latin American nation), in daily life, the sexualization of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador is a way to reinforce national distinctions. In addition, the economic vulnerability of many Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuadorian border regions is perceived as an element that would predispose these migrant women to paid sexual relations, making them especially "suited" for the sex trade. This means that mental images of Peruvian and Colombian women as friendly, joyful, warm, physically attractive, and sexually available are quickly directed toward the sex industry and this sustains a demand for "exotic/erotic" women, as I explain in chapters 2 and 3. Thus, a brothel client in Machala explained why Ecuadorian men look for these "foreign women" in sex businesses: "Ecuadorian women are *cohibidas* [sexually restrained], while Colombian women are *avispadas* [quick-witted], and they know better how to treat a man."

It is important to bear in mind that the exoticization of the migrant "other" is a process in which those defined as different are valorized but simultaneously imposed inferior status. Kempadoo (2000) explains this process in relation to the functioning of the international sex trade. The author argues that exoticism goes hand in hand with eroticism whereby the sexuality of the "other(ed) women" is defined as "highly attractive and fascinating, yet related to the natural primitiveness and lower order of the other cultural group" (p. 2). Therefore, migrant women who are valued as physically attractive and sexually desirable, and hence highly in demand in the local sex industry, are also exploitable and vulnerable in relation to the resident population who also see them as inferior regarding notions of "proper"

femininity. This is certainly the case of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the Ecuadorian sex trade.

In contrast to sex clients and sex business owners, who appreciate the presence of Colombian and Peruvian women in the local sex sector, other actors in El Oro perceive this presence with suspicion and fear. And this is because migrants in the sex trade are linked to different problems in the province, such as unemployment, common delinquency, organized crime, and the sex trafficking of women, an issue that is highly positioned in both local and national agendas. "Foreign women in prostitution" and the social problems they supposedly bring about are also connected to the Ecuador–Peru open border.

A resident of Huaquillas, for example, linked sex trafficking, prostitution, and other social and economic problems in this city with an "out-of-control border." The discourse of this man confirms the hypervisibilization of migrant women in borderland residents' discourses about trans-border migrations, and it shows that these migrant women are constructed simultaneously as "harmful" figures and vulnerable victims:

> Before 1998 there were not so many Peruvians [in the city]; there was more control then. The border used to close at six in the afternoon. Today the border is open 24 hours a day due to the agreements signed [by Peru and Ecuador], and now Huaquillas has Peruvians in shrimp plants, in domestic service, in agricultural activities. There are also women from Chiclayo (northern Peru) coming to [work in] prostitution because they are considered prettier and men here prefer women from other countries. … But this is harmful because Ecuadorians are left without work; Peruvians are taking jobs away from us. There are also mafias that take Ecuadorian women to Peru and Peruvian women to Ecuador; I know the case of two minors.[28]

Thus, Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex trade are stigmatized, either as victims of sex trafficking or as dangerous sex workers. In both cases, these migrants are marked by a sexual stigma connected to prostitution. This stigma, as suggested above, not only affects representations of individuals, but also representations of nations. Jacobsen and Skilbrei (2010) conjure this idea to explain

how the prostitution stigma inflicts shame and blame not only along gendered lines, as most authors studying prostitution have shown, but also along lines of national identity. This is part of the sexual stigmatization of national origin process. As I explain in following chapters, this stigmatization process informs perceptions and representations of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador and, as a consequence, it guides migrants' experiences in destination.

The point I want to make here is that in a border province like El Oro, which has been particularly shaken by economic transformations, integration projects, and increasing cross-border movements, Colombian and Peruvian women in the local sex trade draw particular public attention because their bodies—perceived as open, offered, and vulnerable to others—are symbolically connected to the borders of the nation-state, which are also open and thus vulnerable to the "invasion" of "dangerous" people and activities. Therefore, I argue that the fears and social anxieties provoked by "foreign women in prostitution" reveal broader anxieties about "invaded" or "penetrated" borders and boundaries. These anxieties refer to the threats those who are "dangerously close"—Colombians and Peruvians in general, and trans-border migrant women in the sex trade in particular—represent to national origin orders.

Chapter 4 analyzes more deeply the two main mental images defining Colombian and Peruvian women in the El Oro sex trade and the public anxieties this group of migrants provokes. The first image depicts these migrants as "illegal" sex workers and vectors of sexually transmitted infections; the second one describes them as passive victims of sex trafficking "mafias" that jeopardize national security. I will illustrate how these images and the fears they entail encourage the adoption of tighter migration regulations and new forms of border control. In this sense, the relation between state borders and the sexualized bodies of the female migrant "others" is both symbolic and metaphorical, and one that can have material consequences in the lives of these migrants.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, three aspects of geographic-political borders were underscored. One, border practices and border meanings are not static; they are historically constructed and depend on particular political and economic contexts. Two, territorial borders constitute a privileged locus to analyze the ways in which we imagine "ourselves" and "others" in an interconnected world, and to better understand how national, gender, sexuality, and class boundaries are drawn during cross-border movements. Three, the mental images politicians and intellectuals, especially those in central cities, construct about border territories are often quite different from daily life at the border, as Baud and van Schendel (1997) assert.

I examined the local meanings of and daily life relations in the Ecuador–Peru border from the perspective of border populations. My ethnographic work reveals that both alliances and tensions concur in a border territory that is historically linked by social, cultural, and economic networks but where nationalist ideologies continue to influence the subjectivities of border populations, despite or perhaps because of sub-regional integration projects.

Indeed, the integration accords adopted by Ecuador and Peru after the 1998 peace accord, and endorsed by sub-regional agreements embraced by the Community of Andean Nations, are creating important changes in the Ecuador–Peru border area as well as new tensions between inclusion and exclusion that are expressed in terms of nationality. The arrival of Colombian and especially Peruvian migrants in the border province of El Oro fuels these tensions even more, and it motivates various discourses where migrant women are particularly visibilized. I argued that the exoticization and sexualization of these migrant women reinforces national differences and creates moral distance between people that are geographically, culturally, and ethnically close. Further, "foreign bodies" and the sexual practices attributed to them become symbols of the border and its complex relations in a context of regional integration: these bodies seduce and motivate

close contact, and simultaneously they stimulate fears about violated or penetrated borders.

In following chapters, I will show that processes of "othering" in migration and border contexts are in fact "technologies of power" that not only guide hierarchical relations but also set the stage for episodes of migration exclusion (Mahler and Pessar 2006). In this way, the discursive division lines traced between "us" and "others" translate into material practices that reinforce the geographic borders of the nation-state.

CHAPTER 2

GLOBAL FLOWS AND THE LOCAL SEX INDUSTRY

> Prostitution is not found at all borders, nor, of course, is it found only at borders. Many factors can contribute to its presence and absence, among them its legality or illegality in the states concerned … and the moral voice of the wider society. Labor market conditions obviously play a major part.
>
> —Donnan and Wilson (1999: 92).

> The growing commercialization of sex is often the unintended consequence of opening up an economy to the larger world.
>
> —Dennis Altman (2001: 109)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, *La Puentecita* was one of the biggest *zonas de tolerancia* (red-light districts) in Ecuador. Located on the outskirts of the capital of El Oro, Machala, *el barrio* (the neighborhood) offered 150 rooms for commercial sexual exchanges and it was constantly visited by European, Asian, and especially U.S. *vaporinos* (sailors) who arrived in the province on banana cargo ships. During those years, Ecuador and El Oro in particular were going through a "new banana export bonanza" (Wunder 2001; Maiguashca 1992) that stimulated different formal and informal economic activities in the province, including the growth of the sex trade.

Thus, brothels, nightclubs, and bars burgeoned in Machala and also in Puerto Bolivar—the primary banana export port in the country at the time—where *vaporinos* looked for local entertainment and, according to some Ecuadorian sex workers, paid twice and sometimes three times as much as local men for sexual services.

Twenty years later, *La Puentecita*, a complex with numerous drinking salons, around 80 rooms for commercial sex, telephone cabins, eating places, and transportation facilities still moves people and money, just like other formal and informal sites for commercial sexual activities and erotic services in the province. These sites offer labor opportunities to an increasing number of informal workers, principally women but also men (who engage in different facilitating positions), who have been excluded from the benefits of the export-oriented economy that has historically prevailed in El Oro.

In this chapter, I situate the global-local connections in which sex work and erotic services are embedded. As Parreñas (2001: 192) says: "globalization is a framework that needs to be considered in order to achieve a complete understanding of the local." Other authors have emphasized the complex interconnectivity between the global and the local, focusing on the ways in which economic and cultural processes that are part of globalization—such as rapid circulation across borders, technological innovations, and the development of global markets and a global consumer culture—have affected different aspects of life, including labor, leisure, and sexuality (Constable 2009; Bernstein 2007, 2008; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Altman 2001). Thus, to better understand the El Oro sex industry and local actors' involvement in and responses towards commercial sexual activities, I look at the links between this local industry and the movements of capital, goods, people, and ideas in this particular setting and across its borders. The global-local connections I examine will take into consideration both political-economic structures and the cultural and gendered processes that sustain the sex industry.

Therefore, this chapter has three main objectives. First, it will argue that commercial sexual activities, usually defined as "illicit", "criminal," or "clandestine" are in fact linked to broader economic dynamics, both formal and informal, and to a process of economic globalization in which women are incorporated through "alternative circuits for survival" (Sassen 2002). According to Saskia Sassen and Lin Lean Lim (1998), particular macroeconomic policies and

patterns of development have directly or indirectly influenced both the supply of workers to, and the demand for the services of the sex industry. This is especially clear in developing countries where structural adjustment policies have connected local economies to international markets and have stimulated economic growth and urban development but with enormous costs for wide sectors of the population.[1]

Secondly, this chapter explains the policies and regulations concerning commercial sexual activities in Ecuador, underscoring the local understandings of gender and sexuality that underlie a largely tolerated local sex industry. In fulfilling this second objective, I hope also to show that national and local perceptions and regulations of commercial sex are influenced by debates and policies taking place in the global arena.

Thirdly, I show how the presence and the permanent movement of Colombian and Peruvian migrants into Ecuador sustain the mercantilist logic of the sex industry, which is based on the constant rotation of women and the offer of new and "exotic girls" (Oso 2008). This logic, a characteristic of global consumer capitalism, illustrates the connections between female cross-border migrations and the local sex trade.

Export economy, migrants, and brothels

As many other developing countries, Ecuador participates in the global economy through the export of primary products. Oil, banana, shrimp, cocoa, coffee, and flowers are the main export products sustaining the Ecuadorian economy. Within this context, the coastal province of El Oro has been of particular importance to the country due to its rich and varied natural resources, which have long attracted the attention of local elites and even foreign investors who arrived in this region in the 19th century (Poma 2000). Thus, although cross-border commerce and petty trade have been central economic activities in this province, banana production and

export are the main axes in El Oro's economic dynamism and transformation (Larrea 1987).

Figure 2. Banana plantations on both sides of a major highway in El Oro

Indeed, banana monocultures were established in large extensions of land in Machala and other cities of El Oro in the 1950s in response to high global prices. This motivated massive highland-to-coast migrations and the hiring of migrant workers, most of them men, in banana plantations and fruit shipment (Maiguascha 1992). In 1954, Ecuador became the world's largest banana exporter, a position that it maintains today, while El Oro became the province with the largest number of banana producers in the country. Therefore, large numbers of workers were also required for the construction and maintenance of new roads, the operation of port facilities, and for transportation, communications, and commercialization systems (Larrea and North 1997).

This first banana "boom" period (1948-1965) stimulated a very significant demographic and economic expansion of the province, especially its capital, Machala. In a few decades, it was transformed from a small town into a rich and important middle-sized city.[2] In the early 1970s, El Oro ranked fourth in per capita productivity among Ecuador's (then) 20 provinces, and a local bourgeoisie that reinvested and consumed in the area favored the development of internal markets

(Larrea and North 1997; Larrea 1987). Entertainment services were part of these newly developed local markets.

Nonetheless, export-oriented economies are highly vulnerable to the ups and downs of international markets as well as to other external factors; El Oro's economy was no exception. Thus, the first banana "boom" was followed by a cycle of stagnation due to competition from other producers/suppliers, lower international prices for the product, and natural events affecting the fruit (UNEP 2002; Wunder 2001; Maiguascha 1992).

Ecuadorian authorities and private actors involved in the banana sector responded with different measures intended to increase productivity and competitiveness and propel technological innovations. These innovations, in turn, reduced the size of the labor force directly involved in this sector, especially unskilled workers,[3] and they were largely responsible for a "steady decline in the wages of the remaining labor force, with 'excess' labor moving into the low-productivity urban informal sectors of the coastal cities" (Larrea and North 1997: 917).

In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, however, a new banana export bonanza took place in the country, stimulated by macroeconomic policies that favored agriculture for export. This second "banana boom" coincided with a severe economic crisis that affected Ecuador, as well as other Latin American countries, and was linked to the explosion of foreign debt. The Ecuadorian government adopted open market reforms and policies supporting the export sector (structural adjustment) in order to stimulate internal savings, stabilize the local economy, and promote its reactivation.

As an ample body of literature has shown, structural adjustment and trade liberalization policies adopted in the 1980s and 1990s in Latin American countries impelled economic growth, increased exports, and thus accelerated the integration of local economies to the global market. However, these macroeconomic policies had important social costs.[4] Cuts in government spending, mainly through the

reduction of real wages and the elimination of different subsidies, affected the living conditions of the Ecuadorian population, especially urban sectors. In that period, unemployment drastically increased, as did the flexibilization and deregulation of labor, measures adopted to reduce production costs and increase competitiveness. As a consequence, more and more workers turned to the informal sector, while those involved in the formal labor market experienced a deterioration of their labor conditions.

It is no coincidence that the sex sector of Machala and Puerto Bolivar expanded precisely during this period. According to Espinosa (1987), who investigated the situation of banana stevedores in Puerto Bolivar in the 1980s, the unstable working conditions and poor wages of these laborers pushed them and their families to look for supplementary jobs (petty trade, for instance) and other "survival strategies." Given the fact that inclusion in other economic sectors was limited, Espinosa suggests that smuggling and prostitution were some of the "survival strategies" that stevedores and their families relied on. Thus, Espinosa's work underscores the role women play in the reproduction of the labor force and in complementing low salaries in the banana sector, and visibilizes one of the gendered links between this export sector and the sex trade.

During the late 1980s daytime brothels and nightclubs mushroomed in Puerto Bolivar, Machala, and other cities of El Oro. Apart from local men, European, U.S., and Asian *vaporinos* linked to the banana industry, as well as Peruvian cross-border traders, have been assiduous visitors of these sex businesses. For this reason, a big nightclub of Puerto Bolivar that opened its doors in the 1980s and closed nearly 30 years later welcomed the visitors with a sign in English, Russian, and Spanish.

Similarly, at the entrance of a brothel in Huaquillas, a colorful painting portraying the image of a woman in a red bikini includes the price of a sexual transaction in both U.S. dollars and Peruvian soles (see figure 3). This shows that the position of El Oro as a border province with a dynamic international port certainly influenced the development of the sex industry.

Figure 3. *Talibán* brothel in Huaquillas with fee announcement in U.S. dollars and Peruvian soles

Since the early 1990s, barras-bar and other informal and "clandestine" sites for commercial sex and erotic services also proliferated in El Oro, particularly in Machala (Cordero et al. 2002). Internal migrants composed a large percentage of the women offering services in these places. It was at the beginning of this century that the presence of Colombian and Peruvian women in El Oro's sex industry increased.

The sex industry and the feminization of survival

In the last twenty years, El Oro's economy has maintained an export-oriented model that has sustained the economic growth of the province but has had limited results reducing inequality and improving living conditions for the majority of the population. The numerous shantytowns that exist in Machala and Puerto Bolivar illustrate this,[5] as do the poor conditions of rural areas and border towns. For instance, the province has dramatic disparities with respect to sanitation services. According to the 2010 national census, 64% of El Oro's population has access to public sanitation, a percentage that is higher than the national average (52%). Nonetheless, this percentage decreases in border cities like Huaquillas (45%) and

Arenillas (39%), and sanitation is virtually absent in rural areas of the province (6%) (INEC, Censo 2010).

Likewise, although El Oro's agriculture sector is very large and demand for labor in agriculture is high, unskilled workers in this sector face precarious working conditions, such as long working hours and very low wages.[6] Something similar occurs with the export sector; in recent decades, it has incorporated female labor but without job stability and with equally poor working conditions. Martínez (2004), who has studied the Ecuadorian banana export sector, argues that the comparative advantage that Ecuador still has in the world market is an abundant supply of labor and low wages that make production costs more competitive (see also HRW 2002). Hence, to escape low wages and labor exploitation, many unskilled workers in El Oro have turned to self-employment in the informal sector.

According to a national employment poll published at the start of this ethnographic project, in 2006, almost half of the El Oro's labor force (49.6% of women, 48.4% of men) was engaged in the informal economic sector. Another important group had left the country to find better employment opportunities elsewhere.[7] The same national poll found that only 27% of women and 37% of men in the province were fully employed, that is, enjoyed stable labor occupations, earnings at or above the minimum wage, and access to social security (INEC-Encuesta Urbana de Empleo y Desempleo 2007). The labor situation of this province deteriorated further during the 2008 international financial crisis. Although overall Ecuador was not seriously affected by this crisis, El Oro and Guayas, two provinces where the export economy is very important, experienced an increase in unemployment rates during the first year of the crisis. Thus, El Oro's unemployment rate went from 4% in 2007 to 7.3% in 2008, a percentage that exceeded the national average (5.9%). According to other official statistics, in 2008, the unemployment rate for women (11.2%) was almost three times the unemployment rate for men (4.7%) (INEC-Encuesta Urbana de Empleo y Desempleo 2008).

Consequently, for individuals and families that have not benefitted from El Oro's export-oriented economic model, both formal and informal spaces of the local sex industry constitute a source of income and employment. The migrant women I interviewed claimed that the sex sector offers employment opportunities that are not available in other economic sectors and earnings that are higher than in other informal jobs.

In 2010, between 3,500 and 4,000 women worked in the 12 registered (legal) brothels and nightclubs of the province.[8] Many of these women were engaged in establishments of Machala and Puerto Bolivar, as well as in the red-light district of *La Puentecita*. These figures, however, do not include women working in the dozens of barras-bar existing in El Oro[9] and in more private locations where sporadic and informal commercial sexual encounters take place. These working-class women are part of the 27% of women heads of household in the province, and their involvement in the local sex sector has given them the means to support their families and, in the case of cross-border migrants, send remittances to Colombia and Peru.

But female sex workers are not the only people involved in the sex industry. Men work in brothels and nightclubs as disc-jockeys, managers, waiters, security guards, and taxi drivers. Unskilled workers—both men and women—also work near these adult entertainment establishments as shoe shiners and informal vendors of food, cigarettes, and pirated CDs, while others set up food stalls in the vicinity of these locales. Likewise, brothel owners profit significantly from renting rooms to sex workers. In 2010, *La Puentecita* managers charged between 30 and 60 US dollars per week for each of the 70 or 80 rooms (the surface area of each is about six square meters) in this red-light district. In other sex businesses, owners also charge women for meals, hygiene products, and condoms, and impose fines on those who arrive late to work (this is common in some nightclubs). Additionally, sex and erotic businesses are directly or indirectly connected to economic activities

that are part of the formal economy, such as hotel and motel services, transportation and communication facilities, alcohol and condom dealers, etc.

In Ecuador, where adult prostitution is regulated by the state, even public institutions are economically linked to the sex industry because they have to issue and charge for the different types of permits and licenses that are required for running a sex business. This is the case of local police headquarters (*intendencias de policía*), town councils, and fire and health departments in Ecuadorian provinces. In recent years, the Ecuadorian Internal Revenue Service (*Servicio de Rentas Internas*) has also benefited from the taxes paid by formal and registered adult entertainment businesses.

Therefore, despite the informality and underground nature of some of these sex and erotic businesses, it is not a mistake to consider them part of an industry that offers sources of income to workers that have been excluded from the formal economy due to their class and educational backgrounds, gender, nationality, and migration status. As Lim (1998: 1) explains regarding the sex sector in Southeast Asian countries: "the sex business has assumed the dimension of an industry and has directly or indirectly contributed in no small measure to employment, national income and economic growth." For this author, the expansion of the sex sector is not connected to absolute poverty as much as it is to patterns of development and macroeconomic policies that while encouraging economic growth and spreading new forms of consumerism, have also increased economic inequality and the cost of living. These patterns are stimulating the involvement of young low-income women in the sex trade as well as the demand for their services.

The work of Saskia Sassen (2002) puts more emphasis on the local-global connections in which commercial sexual activities are embedded. This author analyzes the links between major conditions in developing countries that are associated with economic globalization—such as government debts, austerity programs demanded by international agencies to address these debts, and increasing unemployment—and the expansion of "alternative circuits for survival" like migration and prostitution. Sassen conceptualizes these alternative circuits as

"countergeographies of globalization," and she argues that they are an indicator of the feminization of survival because "it is increasingly on the backs of women that these forms of making a living, earning a profit and securing government revenue are realized" (p. 258). The author also explains the role of the sex industry in certain economies:

> At some point it becomes clear that the sex trade itself can become a development strategy …. When local manufacturing and agriculture can no longer function as sources of employment, profits and government revenue, what was once a marginal source of earnings, profits and revenue, now becomes a far more important one. (Sassen 2002: 270)

Certainly, not only workers, businesspeople, and governments benefit from the sex industry; criminals do also, through illegal activities like drug smuggling, sex trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of children. These illegal activities are not absent from El Oro's sex sector. Recent reports have indicated that girls, boys, and especially teenagers have been victims of sexual exploitation in formal and informal spaces for commercial sex (brothels, barras-bar and also clandestine establishments).[10]

However, this chapter emphasizes that crime is not the only factor behind the expansion of the sex industry. In El Oro, the growth of this industry is strongly linked to national macro-economic policies adopted in the context of neoliberal globalization, and to an increasing demand for sexual and erotic services that is sustained by local constructions of sexuality and gender.

Local ideologies, national regulations, and global debates

Prostitution and the sex industry are certainly issues that have raised social interest and concern around the globe. These issues have been connected to criminality, public health problems, and violence against women, as well as to debates about female labor and civil liberties. Therefore, national governments have adopted

different policies in relation to commercial sexual activities and the sex industry. This section examines these policies and regulations in Ecuador, arguing that they are influenced by local understandings of sexuality and gender, and by debates taking place at international levels.

Regulatory policies toward commercial sexual activities express different aspects of nations' social relations (Clark 2001), and they are connected to public ideas about femininity and masculinity, family, nation, and citizenship (Caulfield 1997; Guy 1991). Kim Clark makes an interesting analysis about the debates regarding prostitution policies in Ecuador between the 1920s, when official regulations initiated, and the 1950s. She explains that in that period, still influenced by the Liberal Revolution (1895) that laid the foundations for the modern Ecuadorian state, prostitution was not a moral but rather a public health concern. Prostitution was viewed as the vector of "venereal diseases" and a "dangerous behavior" that could seriously affect the "health of the nation" and the race of its future generations. Therefore, medical intervention and health control, especially among the poor, were considered central in these early debates about regulating prostitution. This means that Ecuador, along with other Latin American countries, institutionalized the regulation of prostitution rather than its abolition or prohibition,[11] following debates and policies adopted in different countries around the globe, particularly Europe.

Although Clark's study focuses on the debates around and the regulation of prostitution in the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, her analysis suggests how Ecuadorians in other regions of the country perceived and responded to this activity. For instance, she explains that the Catholic moral code that sustained the idea that sexuality should be lived exclusively inside a legally constituted family, and thus proposed the abolition of prostitution instead of its regulation, was more salient in the highland region than in the coast. An indication of this was the fact that in coastal provinces there was (and there still is) a higher percentage of civil unions in relation to legal marriages.[12] I would add that the widespread tolerance

towards commercial sexual activities in coastal cities like Machala is another indication of a more flexible moral code in this Ecuadorian region.

The early 20th century regulationist system of prostitution still functions today. Therefore, in Ecuador "prostitution" (the term "sex work" is hardly used in official documents or national laws) is a legal activity for women over the age of 18, so long as sex businesses are registered and sex workers follow health protocols. Brothel ownership is also legal in Ecuador. Although these norms are not explicitly included in any current legal instrument, national and local authorities follow the principles of the former Ecuadorian Health Code, which was in effect until December 2006 and gave general guidelines about the regulation of prostitution. This Health Code indicated that prostitution "is tolerated in indoors businesses and those who exercise this activity should submit to periodic prophylactic check-ups" (Art. 77). Commercial sexual transactions taking place on the street, in businesses lacking the required authorizations, or involving women that have not passed medical check-ups were defined, and are still considered, as "clandestine prostitution" and therefore illegal.

Only in 2007 did the Ecuadorian Health Ministry establish national norms and guidelines for sex workers' activities and their "comprehensive attention" (Acuerdo Ministerial No. 261). In contrast to other official documents, the *Guía Nacional de Normas y Procedimientos para la Atención Integral de las Trabajadoras Sexuales*—elaborated with the participation of sex workers' organizations—approaches commercial sex as work, and it aims to offer comprehensive medical services to sex workers. In practice, however, many of the principles included in these national guidelines are not implemented by local authorities. For instance, the national guidelines establish that registered sex workers will receive a national "health card" in order to obtain monthly medical attention,[13] and clearly state that this card "should not be considered as a requirement to exercise sex work" (p. 22). But in daily life sex workers are required to carry this health card, which serves as a sanitary certificate and a

condition to work in authorized sex businesses. Moreover, presentation of the health card is often demanded by different control authorities, such as migration police officials, although the national guidelines establish that only health officers can check this card.

Even though registered sex workers in Ecuador do not really receive comprehensive medical attention (but essentially pass monthly genital examinations to control for sexually transmitted infections instead), the Health Ministry's national guidelines are unique in that they define women in the sex sector as workers and subjects of rights, especially health rights. This (still limited) human rights perspective is not considered by other official documents and legal instruments that refer to women in the sex trade fundamentally within criminal and punitive approaches. The Ecuadorian Labor Code, for example, mentions prostitution exclusively to refer to activities that are prohibited to or affect underage persons. Consequently, even if prostitution is tolerated and regulated by the Ecuadorian state, Ecuadorian laws do not officially recognize it as a legitimate economic activity or form of employment.[14] This puts women in the sex trade in an ambiguous legal condition, where moral, health, and security concerns restrict their rights and encourage surveillance and control. Local ordinances corroborate this situation.

In many Ecuadorian cities, municipal ordinances directed to control land use or to protect "public morality and decency" have established that sex businesses should be located in peripheral zones, far from residential areas, schools, and churches. So-called "tolerance zones," which bring together various sex businesses within closed complexes located outside cities, are a result of these ordinances. They illustrate Foucault's (2003 [1975]) reflection about the segregation of "deviant" conducts and individuals into closed sites; this segregation is aimed at facilitating control. Drawing on Foucault, some Ecuadorian scholars have critically analyzed the establishment of "tolerance zones" as well as local projects that focus on *regeneración urbana* (urban regeneration) and *seguridad ciudadana* (public safety) through the exclusion of poor and marginal people—

such as street vendors and street-based sex workers—from central and middle-class urban areas (Allan 2009; Carrión 2009).

In sum, regulatory policies toward prostitution in Ecuador are characterized by tolerance and control happening at the same time. Below, I explain that these policies respond to particular understandings of sexuality and gender.

The "necessary evil" and the "social evil"

Despite legal vacuums and ambiguous norms in relation to commercial sexual activities, the regulationist system that has prevailed in Ecuador and other Andean countries reveals the pragmatic responses of national and local authorities with respect to what they perceive as an "inevitable problem" or "*un mal necesario*" (a necessary evil).

An important body of literature has explained how regulationist discourses and policies have underscored the need to control prostitution (instead of barring it). These discourses and policies highlight ideas of inevitability and unrestrained male sexuality. For instance, Clark (2001) and Nencel (2001) illustrate how the first attempts to regulate prostitution in Ecuador and Peru in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were guided by medical language that referred to sexual intercourse as an "organic function," just as natural as breathing or digesting, and to men as bearers of an "impetuous sexual instinct." Within this discursive framework, prostitution was seen as a "security valve" that protected "decent women" and hence "as necessary to society as trashcans, wastepipes, sewers, etc." (Nencel 2001: 32).

Although in Ecuador nowadays there are multiple actors involved in public debates about commercial sexual activities (middle-class feminists and organized sex workers and not only the male doctors and criminologists of the early 20th century) and there are more complex analyses about the causes of and responses to

these activities, ideas about the inevitability of this "social problem" have remained. These ideas have justified state regulations regarding commercial sexual activities while simultaneously integrating sexual commerce into El Oro's daily life.

Indeed, during my fieldwork in El Oro I realized that the sex sector was part of the social and political life of the province, and not only an element of the economic sphere. In Machala, for example, *La Puentecita* is considered by many local men as a tourist attraction and, as such, a place to take visitors and business clients. Men also see it as a place of entertainment where they can get together to drink, chat, and look at skimpily-dressed women without necessarily engaging in commercial sexual encounters.

Therefore, on Friday afternoons it is not rare to see public employees and other workers arriving in groups at this red-light district, still wearing their office uniforms and identification cards. Furthermore, the heavy foot traffic in *El barrio* has made many political parties consider it a good place to promote their candidates in times of national and local elections.

The following images (figures 4 and 5) illustrate the importance sex businesses have for local and national political parties.

Figure 4. *La Puentecita* brothel in Machala with local campaign propaganda

Figure 5. *La Puentecita* brothel with campaign propaganda

Similarly, *El Talibán*, a tolerance zone located in the outskirts of the border city of Huaquillas, has such a significant foot traffic that local authorities decided to provide the zone with public transportation. Thus, one bus line makes trips to the interior of this *zona de tolerancia* at regular intervals, dropping off clients, employees, and sex workers. When I tried to find out why these and other erotic businesses were so popular in the province, the men and women I talked to—most of them members of the working class—gave me similar answers.

Widespread ideas about men's feverish and uncontrolled sexual nature tend to be connected to the need to tolerate and regulate commercial sexual activities. My male informants were very direct in relation to this issue. This is how an informal trader who declared himself an assiduous brothel visitor expressed himself:

> Men need to *desfogar* [vent their sexual urges]. Women have advantages over men because every month they *desfogan* through menstruation and then they stay calm. But men, especially those that are not married, don't have those types of *desfogues* [escape valves]; that's why they look for sex workers.

Behind these types of ideas, based on essentialist and biologicist understandings of human sexuality, are a series of generalizations and dichotomist conceptions of

gmale and female sexuality. According to these conceptions, men are sexually active, even violently active, while women are sexually passive and often victims of male hypersexual nature.

The informal trader I talked to, however, divided women into two groups: "normal women," defined as calm and sexually passive because they "discharge" regularly through menstruation, and *mujeres alteradas* or *semi alteradas* (sexually disturbed or semi-disturbed women) that he associated basically with sex workers. Hence, this last group of women are essentialized and instrumentalized by many men as *cargadas* (sexually charged) and thus suitable for paid sex. In a similar way, men are essentialized as naturally charged and with a forceful need to *desfogar*, *descargar* (discharge), *desocuparse* (evacuate).

For many local people who believe that sexuality functions as described above, brothels and nightclubs are places that offer an important service, as they adequately channel men's "uncontrolled sexual instincts," preventing rapes and sexual aggressions from occurring. Some Ecuadorian sex workers in Machala support this argument. One of these women emphasized that sex workers play an important role in society because they prevent or at least diminish rape cases. She also believed that men who are alone and far away from their wives or partners, such as military and police officers, are particularly inclined to look for paid sex. Actually, the Ecuadorian sex worker I talked to remembered that in the 1990s, when the military was defending Ecuadorian border towns from "Peruvian aggression," she offered sexual services to conscripts and military officials in their own camps, first in an Amazonian border province and then in El Oro.

However, it is important to highlight that sexual commerce is a realm of contradictions (Kempadoo 1998). That is to say, the demand for and the tolerance of commercial sexual activities often go hand in hand with public expressions of condemnation of these activities and the stigmatization of women offering sexual and erotic services. Not even the longstanding sex workers' organization of El Oro—the *Asociación de Trabajadoras Autónomas "22 de Junio*"—, created in the early 1980s to fight against violence in the sex sector and position women in the

sex trade as "workers" with full rights, has been able to change negative ideas about sex workers. According to these ideas, sex workers are responsible for different social problems, such as sexually transmitted infections, immorality, and delinquency; therefore, these "dangerous women" need to be put under surveillance, along with the places where they work in.[15]

To finish this section, it is important to mention that Ecuador's regulationist approach towards prostitution has some opponents, religious groups throughout the country and some middle-class feminists in central cities like Guayaquil and Quito, among them. This group of feminists has stressed that regulationist policies entail abusive control practices like persecution and imprisonment, as well as the exploitation of women engaged in the sex trade. For this and other reasons, they have defended the abolition of prostitution (see for example Briones 1995).

Even though abolitionism has not been a strong issue in Ecuador, in recent years different national and local actors have adopted an anti-prostitution stance as a result of international concerns about human trafficking, a problem that is conflated with transnational sexual commerce. International concerns about human trafficking have stressed the links between the sex industry and transnational criminal organizations that profit from the sexual exploitation of women and girls. Therefore, trafficking represents "the nexus of all so-called social evils" (Shah 2008: 20), including prostitution, child labor, drug smuggling, HIV/AIDS, and even terrorism.[16]

Consequently, more voices have risen against commercial sexual activities and more actors —feminists groups, governmental and non-governmental institutions working on children and migration issues, among others—have embraced international proposals to increase police raids in the sex industry and implement more effective control mechanisms in border territories in order to protect human trafficking victims. I will come back to this point in chapter 4, where I trace the connections between sexual concerns and migration controls

while paying particular attention to global concerns about sex trafficking and its effects at the national and local levels.

Colombians and Peruvians in the local sex sector

The El Oro sex industry is integrated by three main types of commercial sexual spaces (Cordero et al. 2002). (1) Legal or structured sex businesses are comprised of brothels and nightclubs. (2) Informal or semi-structured businesses are mainly composed of barras-bar, a special type of bar tended exclusively by female personnel and with permission to sell beer but not to offer sexual services. Although barras-bar emerged in the early 1990s as underground brothels, and they even included rooms for commercial sexual encounters, in recent years, due to stricter control, these places essentially offer eroticized services. This means that young and attractive women are expected to serve, accompany, and entertain clients, as well as make them consume, using their bodies to provoke erotic fantasies and desire but without necessarily engaging in paid sexual relations. Actually, most barras-bar no longer have rooms, but they are still perceived by the population of El Oro population "clandestine brothels." (3) "Illegal" or "clandestine" forms of commercial sex include street-based sex work and establishments that do not have the necessary licenses.

As in other parts of the world, sexual and erotic services in Ecuador have been traditionally divided along class, ethnic, and sometimes also age lines. According to these divisions, street-based sex work involves impoverished women (as well as many transgender people) that are not admitted in legal establishments for commercial sex due to their age or physical appearance. This group of women is particularly affected by controls, abuses, and stigmatization, although they have organized in order to confront this situation.

Brothels usually involve working-class sex workers and clients. The most remote, modest, and low-priced of these businesses are referred as *chongos*. In contrast, nightclubs are more exclusive establishments that employ younger

women, and the clientele is made up of middle-class men. In El Oro, however, these class divisions are less pronounced. For instance, some popular businesses, like the tolerance zones of *La Puentecita* (Machala) and *El Talibán* (Huaquillas), receive a wide variety of clients, including both middle- and working-class men. Likewise, many of the women that work in daytime brothels are also involved in nightclubs of the same cities.

The economic crisis affecting El Oro in recent years has blurred class distinctions between working-class brothels and exclusive nightclubs even more. This is evidenced by the low payments that women in both brothels and nightclubs receive. In 2010, for example, women in brothels received between seven and eight dollars for each sexual encounter, while women in nightclubs got between 12 and 14. Furthermore, between 2008 and 2009, many of the exclusive nightclubs of Machala closed their doors, while more informal erotic businesses emerged.

Barras-bar are slightly more differentiated along class, age and ethnic lines, and this segmentation is connected to the cities and neighborhoods where these businesses are located. Barras-bar situated in central areas of Machala tend to have air conditioning and security services, and they are visited by white-collar workers. The women working there are very young, meticulously dressed and made up, and many of them are "tall and light-skinned," as the advertisements of some establishments indicate. This panorama changes in small cities and working-class neighborhoods where barras-bar employ women of different ages and physical appearances, most of them lacking formal education, while the clients are unskilled male workers. The weekly salaries women receive in barras-bar (between 60 and 90 dollars per week in 2010) and the tips they get from clients also depend on the location of these bars and the financial position of their clients.

Figure 6. Barra-bar in Machala

Since the beginning of this century, numerous Colombian and Peruvian women have been employed in the brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar of El Oro. Street-based sex work is not so common among migrants (only one of the 35 migrants I had in-depth interviews with was involved in this type of commercial sex), due to the additional control and, thus, the higher risk of detention and deportation that this activity carries with it.

According to official records of the El Oro Provincial Health Direction, the number of migrant women legally working in the brothels and nightclubs of the province was particularly high between 2002 and 2004. During those years, which coincide with peak numbers regarding cross-border migration flows into Ecuador, 12% of the women initiating their sexual activities in El Oro came from neighboring countries (mainly Colombia but also Peru). The year 2003 was especially salient because 17% of all the women that initiated commercial sexual activities in El Oro were either Colombian or Peruvian.[17] Since 2006, however, the number of Colombian and Peruvian women registered in El Oro's health centers has gradually declined. I would suggest that this reduction is connected to the

tighter migration regulations adopted at the national level and the stricter controls implemented in El Oro.

But it is important to keep in mind that official records do not reveal the presence of migrants in informal spaces of the local sex sector, and they also hide the involvement of un-registered Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the brothels and nightclubs of the province. The latter situation is particularly common among border crossers and temporary migrants from Peru that, just as Ecuadorians living in border regions, have traditionally offered sexual services across the border. Likewise, migrants with an irregular migration status, who are impeded by official regulations from legally offering sexual services, do not appear in official records.

"Exotic girls" and the mercantilist logic of the sex trade

What I want to stress in this subsection is the role migrant women play in sustaining El Oro's sex industry. As different scholars have explained, this industry has been largely guided by the globalization of a vast apparatus of consumerism and the global circulation of people across borders (see for example Altman 2001). Referring to migrant women in Spain, Laura Oso (2008) asserts that, in the context of global capitalism, the sex industry is sustained not only by transnational migration movements but also by the permanent rotation of women in sex businesses, which responds to clients' requirements of novelty and constant renovation. This is because capitalist societies consider novelty itself a value, Oso says. Therefore, clients constantly demand new, younger, and "exotic girls," and sex business owners attempt to satisfy these demands in order to maintain or increase profits.

Although some mature men in El Oro still hold the image of the "traditional sex worker," one who stays in the same establishment for years and maintains a close relationship with her clients, younger men are more in touch with the "mercantilist logic" that Oso talks about and is based on sex workers'

permanent rotation. These new market demands are met with the services of very young women, internal and more recently international migrants.

As discussed in chapter 1, the increased flow of Colombian and Peruvian women into Ecuador since the early 2000s generated a variety of fantasies and desires that were quickly directed toward and profited from in the local sex trade. Thus, numerous brothel and barras-bar owners were eager to receive trans-border migrant women in their businesses. Moreover, until 2005, some sex establishments in Ecuadorian cities publicized the presence of foreign women, Colombians in particular, in their "VIP services."

But the presence of trans-border migrant women in the Ecuadorian sex industry has certainly been affected by migration controls and more frequent police raids in sex businesses (chapter 4). These controls have not managed to remove all migrant women from the local sex trade; instead, they have forced migrants underground and into constant movement from one business to the next, further reinforcing the sex sector's mercantilist logic, which is based on the rotation of women. Hence, Colombian and Peruvian in the sex trade are constantly moving around El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces in order to look for better working places, find new clients, and escape from migration controls. Conversely, business owners that some years ago were concerned about the documentation of their foreign-born personnel now take advantage of the permanent circulation and replacement of these migrant women. As a barra-bar owner in Machala explained in relation to Peruvian migrants in these establishments:

> I guess it's good for them to have a visa because they tend to be very unstable. They stay for one or two months, and then they leave. They go back to their countries, and I have to look for new girls once again. But this is also convenient for me because in this way the personnel [of my establishment] is constantly renewed. Clients don't like to see the same girls. Even if they like one girl a lot, a Peruvian for example, at a certain point they get tired. They like to constantly see new faces.

In addition, the irregularity and permanent movement of Colombians and Peruvians in El Oro have brought about economic benefits to numerous local actors. For instance: many barras-bar and brothel owners charge migrants for rooms to sleep in and food; corrupt police officers regularly exact bribes from these women, and lawyers charge migrants large sums of money for temporary or permanent documentation. For Laura Oso, this situation is part of a "circular labyrinth" that not only marks the labor and living conditions of migrant women in the sex trade, but also reproduces social and gender inequalities in the context of globalization.

This "labyrinth" is produced by a series of circles, among them: the circle of transnational migration (the movement of people across borders), the circle of sex work (the movement of sex workers from one business to the next), and the circle of irregularity (that moves money and merchandises), all of them articulated to the mercantilist logic of global consumer capitalism.

Socio-economic transformations and new forms of commercial sex

Global forces, both cultural and economic, have not only expanded but also diversified the sex industry both in the North and in the South (Altman 2001). Furthermore, global capitalism has encouraged a consumer culture in which different social relationships, including the most intimate ones, are commodified and thus bought, sold, advertised, objectified, and commercialized in the marketplace (Constable 2009). These processes have concrete expressions at the local level.

In El Oro, during the last decade or so, new and more complex forms of commercial sexual interactions have proliferated in response to local transformations in intimate life, technological innovations that facilitate intimate-material relations, and economic processes that have affected the employment opportunities of a large part of the population of the province. Therefore, women

and men of classes that before did not partake in work or enjoyment in the sex industry, now do so.

Indeed, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, commercial sexual interactions in El Oro became more informal and less visible. In Puerto Bolivar, for example, the numerous brothels and nightclubs that existed until the late 1990s practically disappeared, while barras-bar and then other informal forms of commercial sexual interactions multiplied.[18] These new and casual expressions of commercial sex and eroticized services include: escort services, erotic massages, bachelor parties with private striptease shows, adult sex dating services, and informal sexual encounters that take place in hotels, motels, and private apartments. Most of the above services are fairly informal in the sense that they are managed by small groups of people and even individuals. They are also quite covert, although some services are advertised in local newspapers.

The proliferation of these new forms of commercial sexual services in El Oro (as well as in other middle and large Ecuadorian provinces) is related fundamentally (but not exclusively) to middle-class desires to experience casual sexual encounters in private and secure places, evading brothels, nightclubs and barras-bar that are often associated with delinquency. These new forms of sexual commerce also intend to distance themselves from "traditional" forms of commercial sex, which are perceived as impersonal and involving people that are seen as dangerous, vulgar, and disreputable. Therefore, these new services offer encounters with attractive and educated women and men, such as "students" and "models," as some advertisements indicate, and they satisfy demands for more intimate and personal interactions.

It is noteworthy that middle-class people involved in commercial sexual transactions in private places are not as stigmatized as participants in lower levels and public spaces of the sex industry. One example of this is an article published by a national newspaper about "*prostitución de etiqueta*" (2009) (high-class prostitution). This article depicts middle-class women working as escort girls as

attractive and educated females searching for economic independence and part of a growing internet business.

Since 2006, sexual and erotic services in Machala and other cities of El Oro started to incorporate new technologies, such as mobile phones and online advertising. A well-known modality in El Oro is known as *chicas pre-pago* (call girls or literally pre-paid cell phone girls), which involve young women that use their mobile phones to contact clients and offer occasional sexual services. Even though there are no studies about these new modalities of commercial sex,[19] some local organizations have highlighted that youngsters, particularly influenced by consumerism, have engaged in sporadic commercial sexual encounters to get access to brand clothing and expensive technological devices.[20] Local NGOs have also noted that female heads of household, who have been especially affected by low wages and the rise in unemployment rates affecting El Oro in recent years, have been pressed to look for additional earnings that are attained with informal sales and sometimes by engaging in sporadic commercial sexual interactions. This illustrates that women's "alternative circuits for survival" are connected not only to the public and formal spaces of the sex industry but also to more informal sites and ambiguous types of relationships mixing sex, intimacy, and money.

Migrant women have also relied on technological innovations in order to engage in intimate-material encounters. Some Colombian women, for example, use erotic internet pages to advertise their services, often highlighting their national origin and, hence, taking advantage of the eroticized imageries that circulate in relation to them in the country. These forms of commercial sexual encounters, however, were not very common among my informants. Many of them were not regular internet users, while others expressed fears in relation to private sexual encounters with unknown male clients encountered through the internet.

Yet, some Colombian and Peruvian migrants with an irregular migration status and legally impeded from working in the brothels and nightclubs of the province have turned to technology to contact former clients and friends. Mobile

phones have helped these women maintain complex relationships that involve sex, companionship, friendship, romance, and different forms of material gain (see chapter 6). Therefore, even if migration controls present obstacles and impede some migrants from engaging in the visible spaces of the sex industry, these obstacles stimulate new forms of commercial sexual encounters.

Concluding remarks

Sexuality and commercial sex more specifically are influenced by broader political economic processes and cultural changes brought about by globalization, including new forms of inequality, a global consumer culture, and the rapid circulation of capital, bodies, and ideas across borders.

In this chapter, I have adopted a political economy analytic frame to expose the systemic links between programs at the heart of the global economy (and their impact in developing regions) and the growth of the sex industry as an alternative circuit for survival for those who have not benefited from economic globalization processes. The El Oro border province is a particularly interesting location to analyze the economic relations and the global-local connections in which commercial sex is embedded. As a region intensely connected to global and regional economic processes through the export of primary products and a dynamic trans-border trade, El Oro has had an important although unequal economic growth. In this context, commercial sexual exchanges have become part of an informal but important economic sector—"at the margins of the economy and at the edges of the state," as Donnan and Wilson (1999) assert—that creates opportunities for unskilled migrant women.

With this type of analysis I have intended to challenge popular discourses about the presence of migrant women in the sex industry as solely or primarily linked to criminal organizations, especially when these women are in border areas that are seen as sites of transnational crime and violence. These hegemonic discourses ignore the structural inequalities that facilitate the development of the

sex industry, and they pay little attention to the ways in which particular ideologies of sexuality and gender sustain commercial sexual activities.

My analysis also visibilizes the role of internal and international migrants in sustaining the mercantilist logic of the sex industry, which is based on the permanent rotation of women and the constant offer of new and "exotic girls." In following chapters, I will further explore this process: I will explain how gender, sexual, and nationality stereotypes motivate the demand and recruitment of Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex sector (chapter 3), and I will analyze how migration restrictions and controls force migrant women in the sex industry to rotate from one province to another and from one sex business to another in order to avoid controls (chapter 4), further favoring the circulation of bodies that is part of the sex industry.

CHAPTER 3

MOVING WOMEN: INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATIONS AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

> Female sexuality in migration situations functions … as the site of ideological and material struggles that shape the impetus to migrate and influence the manner of settlement and assimilation.
>
> (Manalansan 2006: 235)

Movement has marked a large part of Cristina's (28) life. This robust, copper-skinned Peruvian woman was sixteen years old, single and with no children, when she first decided to leave her origin city. "*Siempre me gustó aventurarme, viajar, trabajar"* (I've always liked to venture, to travel, to work), she said, while her black eyes shined. Cristina is from Piura (northern Peru), 300 kilometers away from the Ecuadorian border. Her father used to work in the Peruvian Amazonia, until he lost his job and financial difficulties started to hit the family. As a result, Cristina left school, her two older brothers moved out of Piura to work, and her mother, who had up to that point devoted herself to household chores, decided to rent the empty rooms of the family house in order to get some income. "Since then, I've always been moving out," Cristina explained, "because I wanted to help at home, to buy some things for me, to be more comfortable."

After two years of continuous movement inside Peru, doing different sorts of informal jobs (hotel cleaning in Lima, informal commerce in the Peruvian highlands and the Amazon region, etc.), Cristina had her first experience as a border crosser. That was in the late 1990s. She traveled between Peru and Ecuador buying and selling fish, apparently without too many problems at the border: "back then Ecuadorian authorities did not worry so much about [border crossers'] papers, so I moved back and forth, without even stopping at check points," she said. This

first experience lasted around two years, and Cristina defined it as "fun," "free," and economically productive. Nonetheless, she decided to interrupt her trips across the border when she got pregnant.

A few years later, in 2006, Cristina resumed her movements between Peru and Ecuador when an Ecuadorian friend found her a job in a barra-bar of Puerto Bolivar. Since then, every year she moves to Ecuador for short periods, taking advantage of the proximity between Puerto Bolivar and her home city in Peru. She usually travels during school holidays, for three or four months, and leaves her young daughter with her mother. "I tried to find work in Peru but what I found was very badly paid," this migrant indicated. The search for work and income opportunities were Cristina primary motivation to cross the Peru-Ecuador border; however, her impetus to engage in circular migration movements and the time she spent in Puerto Bolivar were also influenced by more personal and subjective motives. "*Una también siempre viviendo en el mismo sitio se aburre, y de repente da ganas de salir y ver otras cosas*" (if you live always in the same place, you get bored, and, suddenly, you want to leave and see other things), she said. Friends and boyfriends in the Ecuadorian port city were elements this migrant woman took into account when engaging in a new cross-border trip.

In this chapter, I trace the migration experiences of Colombian and Peruvian migrant women in El Oro. My objective is to explain the particularities of intra-regional migrations within the global South and underscore the role played by sexuality in the different stages of these migration movements, such as decisions to migrate, labor incorporation and settlement in destination, and transnational family relations.

Thus, I look at Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex trade as migrants, and I show that their migration experiences in Ecuador have both commonalities with other low-income female migrant groups,[1] as well as differences and particularities that are guided by the social stigma affecting women in the sex industry.

Although sexuality structures all aspects of migration, it has largely been ignored in migration literature. Often, this literature subsumes sexuality into accounts of gender, and sometimes it even reinscribes normative notions of both sexuality and gender, as some scholars have pointed out. In the case of female migrations, Manalansan (2006) argues that migration scholarship tends to focus on heterosexual married mothers, reproduction, and transnational motherhood. Consequently, "sexuality in this body of migration research is relegated to either reproductive sex, forced abstinence brought about by migration, and sexual abuse, or rape" (p. 241). To change this tendency, Manalansan proposes to see migrant women (and men) not only as laboring gendered agents but also as "desiring and pleasure-seeking migrant subjects," and to recognize that migrants' desires not only express a search for material advancement but also represent "pivotal reasons for the decisions to migrate" (p. 243).

The position outlined above, which I assume in this work, does not ignore that migrant women who offer eroticized services or engage in commercial sexual exchanges are part of complex power structures. Along with scholars exploring migration-sexuality connections, I understand sexuality as a dimension of power that is a conduit to the sexual commodification of migrant women and confronts those involved in commercial sexual activities with different exclusionary practices, just as it happens with other migrant groups that deviate from official sexual and gender norms (Cantú et al. 2009; Epps at al. 2005; Luibhéid and Cantú 2005).

I will start by giving some background about intra-regional migrations in South America and the role of women in them.

Intra-regional migrations in South America

Intra-regional movements within Latin America have taken place from the moment that political borders were imposed by decolonization and nation-state formation (in the early and mid-19th century), separating people that previously shared

territories, culture, and ethnicities (Massey et al. 2005 quoted in Cerruti 2009; see also Pellegrino 2003). Thus, trans-border movements between Andean countries are related to social, ethnic, and family networks, as well as to historic modalities of trans-border work (Torales et al. 2003).

According to Marcela Cerruti, until the 1980s migration movements within South America were, with the exception of highly skilled workers, a more viable option than moving to more developed nations outside the region. Venezuela, in the Andean sub-region, and Argentina, in the Southern Cone, were the main poles of attraction for regional migrants during the second half of the 20th century. In contrast, Colombian migrants made up, and they still do, the largest flow of emigration within the region.

Nevertheless, in the last decade there have been several changes in relation to international migrations in South America. One of these changes is the fact some of these movements involve interlinks between intra-regional migrations and emigration to more developed countries. Likewise, some South American nations now combine their condition of receiving countries with one of sending, transit, and sometimes also return (Duque and Genta 2009; CEPAL 2006b). This is the case of Ecuador.

Another important change concerns the increasing number of women in these intra-regional movements. In the year 2000, women represented 52.5% of the total number of migrants moving between South American countries, one of the highest percentages of feminine migrations worldwide.[2] This tendency, though, varies according to countries and migration streams. For example, Martínez (2003) explains that migrations from Colombia to Ecuador and from Peru to Chile and Argentina are highly feminine.

The reasons behind the feminization of international migrations are multiple and complex. As in other regions of the world, women's autonomous movements across borders are related both to origin countries' limited structural opportunities for social and economic advancement as well as to receiving

countries' demand of migrant labor, particularly for personal services, care occupations, and the entertainment industry. In Latin America, female migrations are also linked to women's growing participation in the public sphere (Cerrutti 2009). A final transformation has to do with the emergence of new attraction poles for regional migrants. This is the case of Chile in the Southern Cone and Ecuador in the Andean sub-region.

Ecuador, a new pole of attraction for migrants in the Andean sub-region

In the late 1990s Ecuador confronted one of the worst economic and social crises of its history, a result of political instability and, among other factors, adverse external shocks (Larrea 2006; Vos and León 2006). Thus, in 1999, the economy of the country drastically contracted, while inflation and unemployment levels shot up, leading to a financial crisis and the collapse of the private-banking system. The Ecuadorian government responded with the freezing of bank deposits (March 1999) and, in January 2000, the adoption of the U.S dollar as Ecuador's official currency. This period of crisis leaded to a "migration stampede," with nearly 700,000 Ecuadorians leaving the country, especially to Spain (Ramírez and Ramírez 2005).

Paradoxically, migration flows of Colombian and Peruvian citizens into Ecuador are also linked to Ecuador's late 1990s period of crisis. As some studies have indicated,[3] since the year 2000, Ecuador received an increasing number of Colombian and Peruvian migrant workers who crossed the border attracted by Ecuador's dollarized economy. But although dollarization has been designated as the main cause for the recent movements of Colombians and Peruvians into Ecuador, there are other factors that I want to explore in this chapter. One of them is the demand for unskilled workers for economic sectors affected by labor shortages left by Ecuadorians' out-migration, and for other labor niches negatively impacted by the recessionary process that hit El Oro during the first years of this century.

According to the Ecuadorian 2010 National Census, 93,237 Colombians and 16,737 Peruvians permanently reside in Ecuador. These figures indicate an important growth compared to the previous national census (2001): a 182% increase in the case of Colombians and a 287% increase in the case of Peruvians. The national census of 2010 also confirms the significant participation of women, especially Colombians, in these migration streams: 52.7% of Colombian residents in Ecuador are women. Migration stocks registered through national censuses, however, present a limited picture: they do not capture the temporary, circular, and intermittent movements that are very common in short-distance intra-regional migrations.

Table 1. Colombian and Peruvian citizens residing in Ecuador, according to national censuses

	Colombian			***Peruvian***		
Census Year	Total	% Female	% Male	Total	% Female	% Male
2001	51,025	53	47	5,831	41	59
2010	93,237	52.7	47.3	16,737	42.6	57.4

Source: INEC, National Census 2001 and 2010

The statistics of the Ecuadorian migration police register the entries and departures of foreign populations as well as the difference between these two movements or net migration. These statistics are more adequate to illustrate the dynamic and unstable nature of south-south migration movements, which depend on the economic fluctuations that characterize developing countries (Parrado and Cerrutti 2003). According to these figures, between 2000 and 2011 the entries and departures of Colombians and Peruvians into and from Ecuador registered a positive migration balance of 1 million 253,404 movements: 657,830 corresponded to Colombians and 595,574 to Peruvians. The participation of women in these

migration flows is lower but still significant: 43% in the case of Colombians and 32% in the case of Peruvians.

Table 2. Colombian and Peruvian migration flows into Ecuador, 2000-2011 (net migration*)

Year	*Total Colombians*	Male	Female	*Total Peruvians*	Male	Female
2000	127,281	72,794	54,487	46,188	25,321	20,867
2001	106,178	62,671	43,507	44,576	29,523	15,053
2002	115,219	69,047	46,172	65,658	47,487	18,171
2003	117,218	68,013	49,205	107,340	78,948	28,392
2004	39,304	21,132	18,172	127,497	89,846	37,651
2005	33,603	18,013	15,590	111,619	69,733	41,886
2006	26,242	13,472	12,770	28,014	17,868	10,146
2007	22,856	12,168	10,688	17,685	12,150	5,535
2008	15,828	8,591	7,237	13,600	8,727	4,873
2009	12,288	6,797	5,491	10,399	7,280	3,119
2010	17,337	9,330	8,007	9,871	6,907	2,964
2011	24,476	12,967	11,509	13,127	8,760	4,367
Total	**657,830**	**374,995**	**282,835**	**595,574**	**402,550**	**193,024**
%	**100**	**57**	**43**	**100**	**67.6**	**32.4**

Source: INEC, Anuario de Migraciones Internacionales
* Difference between entries and departures

As Table 2 shows, net migration figures have gradually decreased since 2004, in the case of Colombians in Ecuador, and since 2006 in the case of Peruvians. One of the reasons for this is that during those years migration controls directed at Colombian and Peruvian citizens residing in Ecuador tightened up, complicating the formal or registered movements of these two national groups.

Nonetheless, the movements of Colombians and Peruvians into Ecuador are still significant, and, in 2011, they represented nearly 70% of the total net

migration into Ecuador. Moreover, it is important to consider that in Ecuadorian border regions international movements are very dynamic but often informal and not always registered in official statistics.

Indeed, numerous Colombians and Peruvians arriving to Ecuador move back and forth without registering their movements and taking advantage of permeable borders and free circulation agreements adopted in the Andean sub-region. For those involved in temporary or circular migrations into a neighboring country, these migration movements represent a relatively easy and attractive strategy to diversify income resources and complement household earnings. In the case of single, childless young women, temporary or circular short-distance migrations are a way of making some savings.

Geographic proximity, social networks in border areas, and lack of economic resources to move to interior cities with better economic and labor opportunities have also motivated an increasing number of middle- and especially low-income migrants from Colombia and Peru to settle in Ecuadorian border provinces. This is essentially the case of Peruvians in El Oro. This group of migrants originates mainly from northern Peru and border departments such as Piura, Tumbes, and Lambayeque, and they settle principally in southern Ecuadorian provinces like El Oro, Loja, and Azuay.

Colombian migrants, in contrast, originate from more diverse regions in Colombia, especially those affected by the country's political and armed conflict: Putumayo, Nariño, Caquetá, Valle del Cauca, Risaralda, etc. They settle in northern border areas of Ecuador or in cities with important Colombian population (Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas and Quito, for instance). Others move to more central and even to southern Ecuadorian provinces, following labor opportunities as well as their social networks.

To better understand these trans-border movements, it is important to get a brief idea about the situation of Colombia and Peru as origin countries.

Colombia

Although Colombia has an old and quite important process of out-migration, massive movements started in the early 1990s. According to Guarnizo (2006), there are two main factors behind these migration movements: first, the deterioration of Colombia's national economy since the late 1980s and, second, the deterioration of the country's political, social, and military situation.

In relation to the first factor, Guarnizo explains that the adoption of neoliberal structural reforms and a significant drop in international coffee prices resulted in the bankruptcy of small private enterprises and a rise in unemployment rates. Between 1990 and 1999, Colombia's unemployment rate nearly doubled (OIT 2000). In the year 2000, the labor situation in Colombia deteriorated even more, mainly affecting women. Therefore, thousands of Colombians left their country, principally for the United States, Canada, and neighboring countries.

The second factor stimulating out-migration from Colombia is a generalized climate of violence, provoked by an internal conflict that goes back to the 1960s in which different armed groups, both legal and illegal, fight for control of Colombian territory. Behind this conflict, there are ideological and political struggles but also socioeconomic grievances, such as land and wealth inequality, and links with the international narcotics trade (Guáqueta 2003).

The longstanding Colombian conflict expanded since the late 1990s. In 1999, the Colombian government decided to abandon peace negotiations with illegal armed groups and in turn implement the *Plan Colombia*, supported by the U.S. government, in order to combat drug trafficking and achieve peace and development. Nonetheless, for many analysts, this strategy, which comprises a heavy military component, has mainly produced negative results, not only inside Colombia but also in neighboring countries (CODHES 2004; Ramírez 2004; ICG 2003a). The "regional spill-overs" of the Colombian conflict include a humanitarian crisis that has pushed thousands of Colombian men and women to

seek protection and security in Venezuela, Panama, and especially Ecuador (ICG 2003b).

Consequently, since the year 2000, the arrival of Colombians in Ecuador dramatically increased as did the number of Colombian asylum seekers. The statistics of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Relations indicate that between 2000 and 2010, Ecuador received around 118,000 Colombian asylum seekers; 51,000 of them were formally recognized as refugees. Among the Colombian women I interviewed, only one had formally sought asylum in Ecuador. Yet most of my informants mentioned violence as one of the reasons behind their decision to migrate. This shows that although economic migrants and forced migrants have often different stories to tell, they also share motivations to leave their origin countries.

Peru

Unlike Colombia, Peru was a country with relative low levels of international migrations until the 1980s (Mármora 1999). However, the economic problems and political violence that developed during that and the following decade motivated an increasing number of Peruvians to leave the country (Altamirano 2003).

Apart from the department of Lima, which concentrates thirty percent of the total Peruvian population and has the highest levels of out-migration in the country, the northern departments of Piura, Tumbes, and Lambayeque register the most important levels of international migrations (OIM-INEI-DIGEMIN 2008). The proximity of these departments to Ecuador makes this country one of the main destinations of northern Peruvians, together with Spain, the United States, and Chile (Berganza and Purizaga 2011). According to estimates of the Peruvian consulate in Ecuador, in 2004, there were around 15,000 Peruvians, regularized and non-regularized, in El Oro (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores-Secretaría de Comunidades Peruanas en el Exterior, 2006).

The movements between northern Peru and Southern Ecuador have a long history (chapter 1). Yet, the increasing migration flows of Peruvian citizens into Ecuador in recent years respond, among other factors, to recent socioeconomic changes in northern Peru. The study of Berganza and Purizaga (2011) explains that despite a relatively good economic performance in northern Peruvian departments, in recent years, most of this region (with the exception of Tumbes) has been affected by income concentration, higher levels of inequality, and the deterioration of labor conditions. Thus, even if provinces like Chiclayo, Piura, and Talara have positive economic dynamics, based on primary-extractive activities and some industry for export, low salaries and labor exploitation are rather common in these economic sectors.[4] My Peruvian informants confirmed this situation.

Some of the women I interviewed in El Oro worked in rice plantations and coffee processing plants in small towns of the Piura and Lambayeque regions before moving to Ecuador. These women complained about the unstable and "harsh working conditions" they experienced in those labor sectors, where they worked 10 and even 12 hours per day, receiving minimum wage or even less. Other informants I met in Ecuador and then visited in Peru lived in the peripheral neighborhoods of cities like Piura, where their families relied on informal and unstable jobs. Cristina's family house, for example, was located in a dusty street where public transport was absent but *moto taxis* proliferated: this private and rudimentary transportation service was one of the informal activities many unskilled workers in the city engaged in. Hence, the important economic growth Peru has had in recent years has not benefitted the overall Peruvian population. Therefore, many low-income and unskilled Peruvian workers have looked for job opportunities in Ecuador, relying on old and new social contacts in this country.

In sum, structural inequalities and political conflict in origin countries, geographic proximity, and historical networks between Andean nations are some of the reasons behind the movements of Peruvian and Colombian migrants into Ecuador. I should add that the restrictive migration regulations that northern industrialized countries, in Europe for example, imposed on Latin American

migrants since the early years of this century made many Andean citizens reformulate their migration plans and look for job opportunities in neighboring countries, where visas are not required.[5] In this sense, South-South migrations are not disconnected from South-North migration processes, as I will illustrate below with some of my informants' stories.

Crossing borders: sexuality, gender, and labor recruitment processes

Gendered and sexualized labor demand and recruitment processes play an important role in female migrations across borders. An extensive body of literature has explained that the increasing demand for unskilled female workers in developed nations, principally for domestic work and the care and service sectors, has motivated women's migration from South to North in large numbers (e.g. Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Parreñas 2001). Furthermore, some studies show how labor recruiters and state policies in origin and destination countries facilitate and thus stimulate these female migrations (see for example Espiritu 2005). Gendered ideologies are central in these "demand-driven migrations." Mahler and Pessar (2006: 48) point out that "gendered ideologies shape employer decisions and consequently migration streams [and employment patterns] because gender is so deeply implicated in people's notions of male versus female work."

Literature on gender and migration, however, still focuses primarily on South-North movements and migrant women in domestic and care work while paying less attention to the experiences of migrants in the sex industry within the global South.[6] Nonetheless, this important body of scholarship suggests the ways in which gender interacts with other socially stratifying forces, such as class, race, and sexuality, to "sculpt peoples into workers" (Mahler and Pessar 2006) and channel them into racialized and sexualized employment niches.

The work of Stefoni (2002) is one of the few addressing South-South intra-regional migrations and exploring the ways in which gender and nationality stereotypes motivate the demand and recruitment of certain migrant groups. Her work reveals that the presence of Peruvian female domestic workers in Chile is not only related to the demand for "cheap" and exploitable labor. This demand also responds to cultural representations that depict Peruvian migrant women as more *serviciales* (obliging) and less *alzadas* (uppish) than Chilean domestic workers.

Likewise, the research of Villacres (2008) about Colombian sex workers in the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, exposes how the sexualization of Colombian migrant women, and stereotypes that construct them as especially "hot" and "voluptuous," serve to exoticize and thus create the demand for this migrant group in the local sex industry. These two studies illustrate that constructions of difference and the formation of a cheapened, gendered, and sexualized labor force is not limited to migration contexts that involve hierarchical links between "First" and "Third" World countries. Stereotypes and hierarchies are also reproduced in migration processes between developing nations.

My ethnographic work in El Oro revealed that the labor demand for and recruitment of unskilled Peruvian and Colombian workers increased since the early 2000s, motivating the movements of both male and female workers into different informal and low-paid activities, such as agriculture, construction, mining, domestic service, and sex work. According to a local newspaper, in 2006, labor recruiters that offered jobs in Ecuador "hunted" in impoverished neighborhoods in northern Peru. "Clandestine agencies" also operated, principally through newspaper advertisements.[7] On the Peruvian side of the border, labor recruiters were also active. In 2009, during a visit to Piura, I found newspaper advertisements offering jobs in Machala and Guayaquil, especially for domestic work.

But in contrast to recruitment processes in industrialized nations, where organized agencies and public programs select the workers and hire them with contracts and labor visas, including in the entertainment industry,[8] these recruitment processes are more informal in movements from Colombia and Peru

into Ecuador. Here, recruitment involves small groups of people and even individuals, rather than formal and organized agencies. Additionally, contracts and labor visas for unskilled migrant workers are a relatively new practice, and they do not include activities in the sex industry (see chapter 4).

Of the 35 Colombian and Peruvian migrant women I had in-depth interviews with, 10 moved to Ecuador after receiving direct job offers or reading and hearing job advertisements in local media. Contrary to what is commonly believed, many of these job offers explicitly and clearly refer to sex work. The story of Katty illustrates how sexual labor demand and recruitment articulates with structural, personal, and even emotional and imaginative factors,[9] encouraging women to cross borders.

As with most of my informants, Katty, a Colombian woman originally from Cali, had had previous migration experiences (internal and international) before moving to Ecuador. Her first experience was frustrating, though. After losing her job as a seamstress and having one child to support all by herself, Katty traveled to Spain on a tourist visa, counting on a Colombian friend who offered to find her a "decent" and well-paid job in that country. In the Barajas airport in Madrid, however, Spanish authorities considered that Katty did not fit the profile of a tourist and thus denied her entry and sent her back to Colombia. One month later, this woman moved to Panama where she worked in the sex trade for the first time. Then, in 2001, she traveled to Ecuador after receiving an offer to work in an exclusive nightclub of Machala. She was 31 years old at the time. This is how she explains the employment offer she received and her motivations for moving to Ecuador.

> **Katty**: I was working in a [sex] business in Ipiales [southern Colombia, bordering Ecuador]. The owner told us that a woman, a Colombian, was looking for girls to work in Machala …. This woman said it was for an exclusive club, with good pay. I thought: yes, I go for sure, because I had been in Ecuador for five days only, and I had felt in love with that country.

Author: This Colombian woman was charging for that contact? Did you have to pay her for the trip or for documents?

Katty: No, we had to pay for the cost of the trip ourselves, and we only needed our identity card [to cross the border]. [The woman said that] the [nightclub] owner [in Ecuador] only demanded that we stay in the business for one month; after that we could do whatever we wanted, either leave or stay …. Maybe she received money from the brothel owner in Machala, I don't know.

Katty had been in Ecuador before but only for a short visit to a touristic zone. During that visit, her image of Ecuador changed from one of a "poor country" with a lot of "smelly indigenous people"—acquired through television and popular culture in Colombia, she said—to one of "handsome men" and "kind people," motivated by an intimate encounter with an Ecuadorian man. The latter image and the job offer she received encouraged her to "*probar suerte*" (try her luck) in Ecuador.

One week after getting the information and contacts from the Colombian recruiter, who was in fact paid by a brothel owner in Ecuador, Katty traveled to Machala with two Colombian co-workers and friends. They traveled by public transport, so their costs were quite affordable (around 50 US dollars per person). Crossing the border was not a problem either because at the time Colombians were only required to present their identity card, not their police record as is now the case. Another factor that facilitated and reduced costs in this migration process was the fact that accommodation was offered by the nightclub owner.

But why do brothel, nightclub and barras-bar owners look for non-national women for their businesses? The exoticized images Ecuadorians have in relation to Colombian and Peruvian women in general and Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex trade in particular constitute the main reason for the demand for and labor recruitment of these migrant women in the Ecuadorian sex sector. As discussed in chapter 1, Ecuadorians construct Colombian and Peruvian women as "warm," "friendly," and sexually open, and thus particularly "suited" for paid sexual relations. Employers and recruiters in El Oro also construct these migrants as "docile" in the case of Peruvians and good for business in the case of Colombians.

Many employers also defined these migrants as available and "hard workers." As a barra-bar owner told me:

> In contrast to Ecuadorian women, who have children and family and often ask for days off, Peruvians are alone so they focus more on work; they are punctual and if you ask them to come earlier to the barra, they will come.

Ideas like the one above moved some employers and intermediaries to cross the border and look for Colombian and Peruvian workers for their businesses. Marco, the Ecuadorian man who ran the nightclub where Katty worked, confirmed this. I interviewed Marco in 2006 when the club he had managed had already closed. He said that his brother was the nightclub's owner and that he had decided to hire exclusively Colombian women. He explained this as follows:

> Hiring exclusively Colombians was the business line. We did it because Colombians make clients consume. They can stay with clients all night long, and they often drink with them. Colombian women drink more than Ecuadorian women! [laughs]. In the business we paid women for each glass of alcohol clients consumed …. Ecuadorian men like Colombian women because they are open and they talk to clients.

Between 1999 and 2002, Marco made regular trips to Colombian cities to look for women for his business and thus "renew the personnel." "Clients don't like to see the same faces over and over again," he explained. His contacts in Colombia made preliminary visits to brothels and nightclubs and selected some girls. Marco made the final decisions, and he lent money to those women who could not pay their trip to Ecuador or who asked for money in advance for household expenses. Although, as Marco acknowledged, this borrowed money (maximum 500 dollars) was often paid back with interest, money debts were not common in the stories of my Colombian informants (only one of 35 traveled to Ecuador with a debt), and they did not necessarily constitute an element of coercion and abuse. Probably, the reason for this is that geographic proximity and free circulation agreements reduce costs and thus risks like debt-bondage. In contrast, an irregular migration status

was a main factor creating vulnerability to abuse, blackmailing, and exploitation (see chapter 4). But Marco was convinced that he was "doing [Colombians] a favor": "they had poor living conditions in their [home] country, and we offered them good pay in Ecuador," he said.

Several Peruvian women in El Oro's sex sector also crossed the border after responding to employment offers and recruitment processes. Some of them were approached by Ecuadorian barra-bar owners in markets or other public places of Peruvian border cities. Others received job offers through Peruvian intermediaries, and some heard job advertisements on the local radio stations of their hometowns. Further, many of these women crossed the border with barras-bar owners (men and women) who traveled to Peruvian border cities to pick up their would-be employees. Once again, money debts were absent from the stories of the Peruvian women I interviewed. Yet, business owners benefited economically from these migrants because they charged them for housing and food.

A main difference between migrants working in brothels and nightclubs and those in barras-bar is that the latter were not always clearly informed about the type of work they were going to do. Some of my informants knew that they would be working in bars, but not necessarily in barras-bar, which are businesses that include only female personnel and offer an eroticized type of service. Still, most of these women decided to stay in the barras-bar because they did not want to go back to their home countries "empty-handed," as many of them said.

It is important to bear in mind that migrants' experiences in the sex trade are heterogeneous: some Colombian and Peruvian women crossed the border and engaged in the Ecuadorian sex sector with more autonomy, while others did so with misleading information or were outright cheated and forced. Among the nearly 80 women I contacted in El Oro and the 35 I had in-depth interviews with, I found two cases of sex trafficking. Both of these women (one Peruvian and one Colombian) crossed the border with their partners as minors (they were 14 and 16 years old respectively), and they were forced into prostitution by them. I came in contact with these women some years later, though, when they had managed to free

themselves from their exploitative relationships. As young adults, these two women returned to the sex industry because this was the only labor sector they knew, and where they had contacts. They said that they did it "independently" and "only for a short time,", until they could save some money.

Another informant, Nicole, a 28-year-old Colombian woman, traveled to Ecuador with a job offer and a 500-dollar debt. She was the only one of my informants who declared that her employers had retained her personal documents during her first weeks of work at a nightclub. She also mentioned that although she knew the type of work she was going to do in Ecuador, she felt cheated in relation to the payment and working conditions she had been offered by the nightclub's owner. This shows that migrants' experiences in the sex trade sometimes combine legal and illegal aspects, such as documented entry and retention of identity documents, and voluntary and coerced processes at the same time.

Hence, demand-driven migrations are not always or not completely coerced or compulsory as some analyses suggest (see for example Mahler and Pessar 2006). In this section, I have explained that labor demand and recruitment not only give migrant women additional motives to cross borders but also produce a particular group of migrants as a suitable and exploitable labor force for the sex industry.

My fieldwork revealed that Colombian and Peruvian women cross Ecuadorian borders with relative ease and without making major expenses due to geographic proximity and free circulation agreements adopted in the Andean sub-region. Consequently, even if those with an irregular migration status sometimes rely on third parties to avoid migration controls, these women are not always victims of human smugglers or debt-bondage, which can be more common among migrants involved in long-distance movements from developing to more developed nations, where traveling costs are higher and tourist visa requirements are quite strict. Furthermore, old and new social networks further facilitate the movements

of Colombian and Peruvian women into Ecuador, and some of these networks also guide their engagement in the sex sector.

Female social networks and labor incorporation

Cantú et al. (2009) argue that migrants' social networks have been largely conceptualized in terms of familial relations or men's labor networks, invisibilizing "alternative network arrangements" like those of single women or gay and lesbian migrants. These "alternative networks," which are often composed of friends sharing not only common origin but also affinities and identities, lead migrants to a "landing pad" where resources for survival and adaptation are shared. Following this argumentation, in this and following sections, I will explain the role of alternative social networks in Colombian and Peruvian migrant women's incorporation into the Ecuadorian sex industry and their larger integration into Ecuador.

I already mentioned that in the early years of this century, Ecuadorian employers and intermediaries traveled to Peru and Colombia to look for women for brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar. Once this demand-driven migration had begun, friendship- and acquaintance-based networks evolved, supplanting to a large degree the need for employers' labor recruitment. In fact, about half of the Colombian and Peruvian women I I had in-depth interviews with (15 out of 35) moved to Ecuador and engaged in the local sex industry relying on girl friends and other female contacts with prior migration experiences in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces (five moved with relatives, four with husbands and partners, and six crossed the border alone). Some of my informants engaged first in other informal occupations and then moved to the sex sector, supported also by female contacts.

Prior female migrants have important "demonstrative effects" as well as particular resources and information that can motivate other people to migrate;

moreover, prior migrants help newcomers overcome migration barriers and find labor opportunities in destination countries (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003). This is precisely how many of my informants experienced their migration process into Ecuador. They relied on prior female migrants that had contacts in sex businesses and sometimes provided housing in Ecuador. Mariana, a 31-year old Colombian woman, for example, moved to Ecuador with three compatriots, one of them with prior experience and contacts in El Oro:

> I came because I had a friend that had already been here. I met her in Venezuela, and there she told me that she had made good money in Ecuador, in dollars. When I heard that I got interested and I told her: "so let's go to Ecuador," because earnings were not good in Venezuela. Three of us [Colombians] came. One stayed at the border, and two of us decided to look for a friend that had been living here for five years. We asked her about the labor scene and she told us to come [to El Oro] because here it was good, so we came. … *Yo venía pa' lo que fuera. Yo pensaba, si me toca trabajar en puteo trabajo, si me sale un trabajo en una casa o algo que me paguen bien, también* [I came ready for everything. I thought, if I have to whore I will whore, if I find a job in a house or something that is well paid, I'll do it as well].

Likewise, some of the first migrants I interviewed in El Oro became in a very short time the connection and support of new migrant women. This was the case of Cristina. Her "successful" trips to Ecuador and the references on new workers required by her employers motivated Cristina's friends and neighbors in Piura to cross the Ecuadorian border and engage in barras-bar of Puerto Bolivar. Cristina lent the money for the traveling expenses of some of these newcomers. In this way, gendered networks influenced the geographic patterning of migration streams (from Piura to Puerto Bolivar or Machala, for example), as well as the concentration of migrant women in feminized and sexualized jobs. The impact of these social networks can also be found in the linkages between nationalities and jobs, as Ratha and Shaw (2007) indicate. These and other authors explain that ethnic and national communities aid new migrants to insert themselves in the racially and national-origin segmented labor markets of destination countries. This

can explain why Colombian women in El Oro are for the most part engaged in brothels and nightclubs, while Peruvians are mostly involved in barras-bar.

But I also contacted trans-border migrant women who first engaged in other informal activities—such as domestic service, hotel cleaning, cooking in restaurants, and serving in shops—before moving into the local sex industry. The experiences of these Colombian and Peruvian migrants illustrate that social networks channeling women into domestic work and those directing women into the sex trade are not so different. My ethnographic work revealed that both groups of migrants relied principally on networks composed of friends, acquaintances, and relatives, or individual employers and intermediaries. Big criminal organizations were not part of these women's migration experiences.

The stories of my informants also demonstrate that the precarious and exploitative working conditions in other gendered and low-status jobs made some female workers turn to the sex industry. The experience of Marcia, a 24-year-old Colombian woman, exemplifies this.

Marcia arrived in Ecuador in 2005, after receiving a job offer to take care of a child in Guayaquil, the largest and most populous Ecuadorian city. She received this offer in Medellin, her origin city, from a female neighbor that was serving as an employment intermediary for her (Colombian) daughter, who was married to an Ecuadorian man and living in Guayaquil. This intermediary paid for Marcia's travel costs and documentation (the police record required of Colombians by the Ecuadorian government since 2004). Already in Ecuador, though, Marcia realized that her dollarized salary was not as good as she had imagined and that the workload was more than she originally agreed to. This is how she explained her impression of her first employment experience in Ecuador, in the domestic sector, and then her shift to the sex trade (brothels and nightclubs):

> [As a domestic worker] I made 150 dollars per month; that was less than what I made in Colombia. And I cooked, cleaned, and took care of the boy. The house was big! The worst of all was the dog, I had to clean all that shit …. One day I saw an advertisement in the daily, they offered 500 [dollars] per month. I thought that

> it was to serve in shops because it said that they were looking for girls for '*atención al cliente*' [customer service]. But I called, and a man clearly explained the work I had to do …. I thought about it for several days, and finally I accepted, and I went to work in a [sex] business of Machala.

Migration movements between developing countries are characterized by minimal and fluctuating economic differences (Parrado and Cerrutti 2003; Ratha and Shaw 2007). For this reason, the Colombian and Peruvian women I interviewed perceived that engaging in the sex sector, where earnings are higher than in other feminized labor niches, was the sole possibility to accomplish their migration plans in Ecuador. However, this situation made most of my informants, including those with a regular migration status, to get stuck in the sex sector. The fact that in a period of around four years only one of my 35 informants, a young Peruvian with medium educational attainment, moved into another occupation—sales promotion, also gendered and sexualized—confirms this situation.

Furthermore, some of my informants in their mid- and late thirties preferred to invest part of their earnings in cosmetic surgeries and in this way keep or increase their number of clients, instead of considering moving into other informal labor activities where earnings are equally low than in their home countries.

Integration, social stigma, and supportive relationships

Settlement, integration, and family relationships are also influenced by sexuality, as queer migration scholars have pointed out. Martin Manalansan (2006) suggests that those migrants constructed as sexually deviant—gays and lesbians, but also heterosexual women engaged in the sex trade—confront two main issues regarding settlement and integration in destination countries. First, these migrants "experience discrimination and stigma from both their own communities as well as from mainstream culture" (p. 236), and, thus, they have to negotiate exclusionary

and stigmatizing practices. Second, migrants that hide their sexual identities and practices from friends and relatives are "often conflicted over issues regarding home and family" (p. 236), although they creatively reconfigure social networks that offer them different kinds of support and alternative household arrangements (see also Cantú et al. 2009). These reflections are very useful when explaining the experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex sector.

During fieldwork, it became clear that the daily lives of my informants were tied more closely to people involved in the dynamics of the sex sector than to the larger Colombian and Peruvian communities. Three elements influenced this situation: the nature of sex work and erotic labor, which includes evening and night work; the intense mobility of migrants across sex businesses and Ecuadorian cities to look for *buenas plazas* ("good places" or profitable working locations); and especially the negative stereotypes affecting women engaged in the sex industry.

I found, for example, that during their initial period in Ecuador many Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex sector lived in the same places as they worked. One of the reasons for this was that sex business owners offered not only employment in Ecuador but also food and accommodation. Those migrants that stayed for longer periods or settled more permanently in Ecuador also lived together. In this way, they constructed alternative household arrangements —where they shared rent and food expenses as well as household chores—and supportive connections that included sharing information on work, migration controls, regulation processes in Ecuador, and social life.

My informants also moved together to work, especially those engaged in brothels and nightclubs. They traveled around the country looking for good work locations, where they worked intensively for one or two weeks before moving to other sex businesses or returning to their cities of residence. Daniela, a Colombian woman in her mid-thirties was one of those migrants that moved intensively to find *buenas plazas*,[10] often with other Colombians or sometimes with Ecuadorian sex workers. The first time I talked to her, in the room of a brothel of El Oro, I asked her where she lived and after thinking for a while she replied: "*Yo ando*," literally

"I walk" but meaning I move around. The big suitcase I saw under the bed of her room confirmed her words.

Hence, the mobility of migrant women in the sex industry—which is linked to the mercantilist logic of this industry (chapter 2), migration controls (chapter 4), and a negative social stigma that forces women in the sex trade to move away from relatives, partners, and friends—not only influences the labor conditions but also the personal relationships of these migrants.

The study of Oso (2010) explains that Latin American migrants engaged in the Spanish sex industry are unable to establish long-lasting affective relationships in Spain due to their intense form of mobility and the type of work they do. Yet, this author shows that other affective relationships are established, less stable, and usually inside the sex industry. Although Oso mainly focuses on intimate relationships, she suggests that friendly and supportive ties can also develop between migrant sex workers and the people that share their work environment. This was precisely what I found among my informants. These migrant women established close relationships with clients and former clients, but also with employers and male and female co-workers. These relationships combined work, friendship, care, romance, and sex (see chapter 6).[11] Although tensions and conflict were not absent from these relationships, they constituted an important source of support, emotional and also economic, for Colombian and Peruvian women engaged in the sex sector, helping them adapt to Ecuadorian society and respond to daily life difficulties.

Indeed, close and friendly relationships established in the sex industry not only offered my informants company, housing (sometimes free of charge), and valuable information but also provided them with concrete support in difficult moments, such as detentions, potential deportations, sudden illnesses, and other unexpected events. For instance, when Nicole experienced a weakening in her health, an Ecuadorian friend and former client took her to a public hospital and paid for the medicines she needed. When she got pregnant and was about to deliver

her baby, she received the support of a Colombian girl friend and former co-worker, who took her into her house for several months.

Further, the supportive relationships Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the sex trade relied on made part of their social life and the moments of pleasure/leisure they experienced in Ecuador, such as dance outings, trips to the beach, visits to other Ecuadorian provinces, etc. These moments of pleasure are hardly visibilized when exploring the lives of working-class migrants from developing countries, particularly migrant women in the sex trade. This is because migrants from this latter group are essentially seen as victims, and never as "desiring and pleasure-seeking migrant subjects," to use Manalansan's (2006) words. Cristina, for example, appreciated the *rumba* (party time) in the barras-bar where she worked and where she made some "good friends." These "party times" were moments of respite and relaxation that Cristina did not have the opportunity to experience in other places, as she worked six or seven days a week and up to 12 hours per day. Thus, work and leisure sometimes overlap in these migrants' experiences.

In contrast, daily life interactions with people outside the sex industry were less common. These migrant women had limited contact with Ecuadorian neighbors and human rights NGOs that offer information and support to sex workers and migrant populations. They were also disconnected from larger Colombian and Peruvian migrant communities and the associations they have formed to get mutual support and share social events. As mentioned above, this limited contact is connected not only to the intense nature of sex work and erotic labor but also to the social stigma that deeply marks women involved in commercial sexual activities. Carolina, a Colombian woman in her mid-twenties, was quite aware of this stigma and of the negative reactions she would have to confront if her compatriots were to "catch" her involvement in brothels and nightclubs. For this reason, she preferred to live and work far away from cities or neighborhoods with an important Colombian population.

> For the moment, I'm not going to Manta (central Ecuadorian coast) to work anymore because this is not convenient for me. There are too many Colombians from where I come from, from my hometown, so I'm afraid of being caught. If some of them get to know what I do, everybody will know it back home.

Migrant women in the Ecuadorian sex sector are judged, excluded, or at best ignored and invisibilized both by migrant communities and by Ecuadorian groups working on migration and sexuality issues, such as sex workers' organizations and human rights NGOs defending migrants' rights. These exclusionary and invisibilizing practices are based on ideas that link migrant women involved in commercial sexual activities to immorality, crime, labor competition, and social image concerns. In the latter case, migrant and refugee organizations tend to distance themselves from their "dishonest compatriots" as a way to change Ecuadorians' negative perceptions and stereotypes about Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the country. As a Colombian refugee woman said in a radio program: "a generalized image [Ecuadorians have] in relation to Colombian women is that we are [all] prostitutes. Well, no, we want to show that that's not true. Many of us are workers, many of us are professional [women]."[12]

The "prostitute stigma" affects representations of nations (in this case Colombia and Peru), as discussed in chapter 1; but it also certainly affects representations of individuals and, as a consequence, their daily life experiences. Therefore, migrants in the sex sector often experience ostracism and isolation, although female co-workers and male clients-boyfriends provide support and company and aid these migrants to integrate into Ecuador.

Lies and family ties

Family relationships are also influenced by the negative social stigma that marks women involved in commercial sexual activities. For this reason, most of my informants, especially those engaged in brothels and nightclubs, lied about their work and their life in Ecuador to relatives and/or partners in origin countries.

Further, the "prostitute stigma" forced my informants to maintain certain distance with their relatives back home, and it influenced their family reunification plans.

Before moving to Ecuador, Carolina, single and with no children, had a very bad relationships with her family in Colombia. At the age of 21, she moved from her hometown in the Colombian coast to the capital, Bogotá, looking for a job opportunity and escaping from the permanent quarrels with her older sister and mother. In Bogotá, Carolina lived with her aunt and cousins. Relations with these relatives were not better, though. Therefore, she decided to move to Ecuador to work.

According to Carolina, her engagement in nightclubs in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces allowed her to "make good money" and hence support her mother and niece with regular remittances. This, she says, not only improved relations with relatives back home but also created an idealized image of her among her family in Colombia. Carolina appreciated this image, and she did not want to destroy it by telling her relatives that she was engaged in an activity that they all perceived as immoral and "not normal." Therefore, she preferred lying about it and living a "double life":

> I have to tell you that my family does not know what I do …. I have a double life. Here I am what I am, and over there (Colombia) I am a *mujer muy sana* [a very sound or respectable woman], to the point that my family praises me to the skies. [According to them], I have hardly been with a man, only with the boyfriend I had over there.

Carolina told her family that she had a wealthy husband in Ecuador; this was the reason she could send money to Colombia. This and other lies my informants told their relatives back home seemed to reflect the dreams or fantasies these women had for their lives. For instance, Piedad, who decided to stay working in Ecuador after a frustrated trip to Spain that was supposed to leave from an Ecuadorian airport,[13] told her relatives in Peru that she had arrived successfully in Barcelona, where she had a "decent" and well-paid job. Even though my informants usually laughed when talking about these fictive stories, they regretted that due to their

engagement in the sex trade, they could not have a more transparent and closer contact with their relatives back home.

The lies migrant women tell in order to conceal their engagement in the sex trade and protect their personal image definitively influence transnational family relationships, but they do not necessarily obliterate all contact with relatives back home. Lies limit and prevent the visits of relatives to Ecuador, even though these visits are quite easy to come about in a context of geographic proximity and a visa-free entry regime. To prevent these visits, my informants had to invent a variety of excuses and find other ways of preserving contact with children and relatives in Colombia and Peru.

Daily phone calls and frequent trips to origin countries are two ways through which migrants in the sex trade maintain transnational links. When women have big lies to cover up, though, these trips are not so frequent. For instance, because Piedad told her family that she was working in Spain, she was forced to limit her visits to Peru to only one per year, although Machala, the city where she worked and lived, is very close to her origin city.

Remittances are also an expression of migrants' transnational links. Many of the women I interviewed, especially those who supported their children all by themselves or were their main providers, sent more or less regular amounts of money to their home countries. Single women with no children but that assumed responsibilities in the economic sustenance of their families also sent regular remittances to Peru and Colombia.

The "prostitute stigma," however, prevents or complicates the family reunification plans of migrant women in the sex trade. This is especially true in the case of women with teenage children, including those migrants with a regular migration status. These women prefer to discard reunification plans because they do not want to face the truth about their work in Ecuador with their teenage sons and daughters. Many of them believe that facing the truth would involve a definitive family rupture with terrible emotional consequences, much worse than

having their children away from them due to their migration process. In contrast, women with small children sometimes move their offspring to Ecuador but not necessarily to the cities where they live. Instead, they send their children to places where they have relatives or close friends that can take care of them while they travel around for work. These two situations illustrate how the particularities of sex work—a negative social stigma and the requirement that women constantly move from one working place to another—shape different family arrangements as well as the conformation of particular transnational ties, a topic that has not been studied by either sex work scholars or migration researchers.

But I also found migrants who decided to confront the truth about their work in Ecuador with relatives back home. This occurred principally among women like Cristina who work in barras-bar and thus are less stigmatized than women in brothels and nightclubs. Others were forced to confront the truth when their relatives found out about their "real life" in Ecuador on their own. Although tense and conflictive moments, reproaches, and even rejection resulted from opening these family relations, telling the truth also brought about positive effects for these women, such as having their children visit or re-join them in Ecuador. This was the case of Katty, the only one of my informants that moved her teenage daughter to live with her in Ecuador, despite her irregular migration status.

Reproaches, humiliation, and rejection were particularly harsh in the stories of migrant women whose partners found out that they were involved in commercial sexual activities. The most dramatic story I heard was told by Daniela, whose boyfriend discovered by chance that she not only danced in nightclubs but also offered sexual services. Although the initial reaction of this man was tears, silence, and distance, shortly after he responded with insults, threats, and finally physical violence.

In this chapter, I have underscored that the emotional distress, exclusionary practices, and isolation that many Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex sector confront in their daily lives in Ecuador and with their relatives back home are directly connected to the "prostitute stigma." This stigma is also connected to

precarious working conditions and to violent relationships with clients, boyfriends, and partners. Thus, my research confirms the arguments of sex workers' activists and feminist scholars studying commercial sex from the perspective of sex workers' rights. These studies argue that the harm and violence that affect women engaged in the sex industry are not products of the inherent violence characterizing this industry but rather consequences of the burden imposed on these women by social stigma and the specific regimes of criminalization and exclusion that serve to marginalize and oppress them (Pheterson 1996; Zatz 1997; Kempadoo 1998).

Concluding remarks

While gender issues have merited increasing attention in migration literature, the role of sexuality still needs further investigation in this literature. My work shows that sexuality and its interconnections with gender, class, and national origin organize the different stages of the migration process, from motivations to migrate to transnational family relationships. Queer migration scholarship has paid attention to most if not all of these stages. Unfortunately, the experiences of migrant women in the sex industry, defined by some authors as part of "queer people" as they do not conform to conventional sexual mores (Epps et al. 2005), have largely been ignored.

Focusing on the particularities of South-South migrations, I analyzed the intersection of the eroticization and commodification of migrant women with other factors influencing trans-border movements within the Andean sub-region of South America, such as old and new social networks and free circulation accords adopted in the context of regional integration projects.

My research reveals that Colombian and Peruvian women, attracted by (sexualized) job offers paid in U.S dollars and motivated by the "success" of prior female migrants in Ecuador, take advantage of the visa-free regime and of the geographic proximity that allow them to move back and forth and keep a close

contact with relatives in origin countries. The stories of my informants also illustrate that migrant women engaged in the sex industry are less exposed to risks like human smuggling and debt-bondage in short-distance intra-regional movements. The reason: geographic proximity and a visa-free regime reduce traveling costs while historical trans-border movements in the Andean sub-region provide border crossers with social connections or job contacts in destination, preventing them from resorting to criminal organizations.

But although the risks and abuses that Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the Ecuadorian sex trade face are often not based on smuggling and debt-bondage, they are connected to the "prostitute stigma" and to these women's condition as "foreigners" and "illegal" migrant workers. Hence, I claim that the experiences of working-class migrant women engaged in commercial sexual activities are part of a larger group of migrants who are treated as an "exploitable" labor force and "non-nationals" with restricted rights. On the other hand, I underscore that the experiences of migrants in the sex industry are rather different from those of other low-income migrant women. Sexuality creates this difference: it traces moral boundaries between "good" and "bad" migrants, and, together with the migration apparatus, it serves as a mechanism of control and exclusion, as I show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SEXUAL CONCERNS AND MIGRATION CONTROLS IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

> …at the site of the women's bodies, state sexual regimes intersect with migration controls in a manner that reproduces hierarchies among women and exclusionary versions of the nation-state. This occurs despite the growth of transnationalizing processes that have profoundly transformed nation-states.
>
> — Eithne Luibhéid (2006: 61).

On a Sunday afternoon in April 2007, I received a phone call from Dayana—a 34 year-old Colombian migrant living in Ecuador—who, virtually screaming, told me: "*migración nos está* llevando!" (the migration police are taking us away!). Talking hastily, Dayana explained that she and her friend Angie (another Colombian migrant) were working in a nightclub when two police officials arrived for an inspection. As Dayana and Angie are legal residents, married with Ecuadorian citizens, I was confused by the fact that they were being detained in a way that usually affects undocumented migrants. Dayana was equally puzzled. She asked me to enquire into the reason for her detention, and she immediately gave one of the officials her mobile phone: "The two Colombian ladies were using their visas incorrectly," explained the official, thinking I was Dayana's lawyer. The *mal uso de visa* (incorrect use of a visa) argument is frequently used by migration authorities to detain and deport foreigners who have been found working on tourist visas.[1] This was not Dayana and Angie's case. Both women had resident permits, as I told the migration official. "Yes, and they are allowed to work, but not in this," he emphasized, "not in a nightclub." The day of their detention, Dayana and her friend had all the documents Ecuadorian authorities demand from migrants and sex

workers: resident identity card, foreigners' census, police record, and the "prophylactic card" (currently called "health card") that allows adult women who have passed medical checkups to work in brothels and nightclubs. Yet both women were detained for several hours and released only after paying the officials a bribe.

Although the presence of Colombian and Peruvian women in the brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar of Ecuadorian border cities is not new, since the early 2000s, they have attracted public attention, giving rise to a series of mental images, fears, and social anxieties. On the one hand, these migrants have been associated with public health and public order problems. On the other hand, they have been depicted as victims of human trafficking, a problem that has gained increasing attention in local, national, and international public agendas.

In this chapter, I focus on the fears and anxieties connected to migrant women in the sex trade, and I analyze the ways in which they encourage restrictive migration regulations and a tighter control of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in general and this group of women in particular. My aim is to show how the exclusionary discourses about migrant and sexual "others" are materialized and institutionalized through migration restrictions and border controls. In so doing, I will illustrate how sexual concerns guide restrictive migration policies, thereby reproducing exclusionary forms of belonging and citizenship. This occurs despite or precisely because of integration agreements in the Andean sub-region of South America and the impacts they have had on borders—which are now more open and interconnected—and border crossings, as discussed in chapter 1.

As several authors have explained, in critical moments and times of social change, prostitution comes into focus as a channel through which multiple and shifting public anxieties are expressed (Guy 1991; Caulfield 1997; Clark 2001; Ho 2005). Some of the fears expressed through discourses about prostitution are the rate of sexually transmitted infections, the changing role of women in society, and unrestricted migrations.

In particular, the work of Bernstein (2004) and Kulick (2003) contributes to understanding the ways in which social anxieties about prostitution interact with

concerns about migrants and migrations in regional integration contexts. Focusing on European unification and expansion, these authors show how debates about the meaning and treatment of prostitution become inextricably intertwined with debates about geographic borders, national, and moral boundaries. According to Bernstein, global capitalism raises a series of material and symbolic dilemmas, such as increasing inequalities and unstable national identities, that are conveniently displaced onto migrant workers and the "threats" of transnational sexual commerce. For Kulick, the attention focused on prostitution and especially "foreign prostitutes" is related to the fact that they are portrayed as embodying the very qualities politicians and policymakers fear about border opening and regional integration. These are "fears of penetration," understood as migrants' "invasion" of national borders, and the "infiltration" of dangerous people, practices, and ideas that threaten national identity and national security.

Bernstein and Kulick concentrate, however, on the ways in which these "fears of penetration" motivate restraining or overtly prohibitionist laws towards commercial sexual activities. But they pay less attention to the parallel ways in which these public concerns encourage the adoption of restrictive migration policies and tighter border controls, both of which have particular effects on migrant women in the sex trade.

Eithne Luibhéid (2002) is among the few scholars that look at the interconnections between sexual regimes and migration controls and at the ways in which these interconnections affect heterosexual women transgressing the official sexual and gender orders of the nation. Luibhéid argues that migration regulations and controls not only respond to concerns about sexuality and its intersections with class, gender, and national origin distinctions; these regulations and controls also contribute to maintaining and reproducing differences, hierarchies, and norms based on these distinctions. Focusing on migration processes into the United States, this author explains that the historical practice of barring or making extremely difficult the entry of certain groups of women into this country—starting

with prostitutes of certain nationalities—was justified under the argument that their sexualities presented a threat to the nation. But even when these women were admitted, "migration procedures ensured that they became incorporated into webs of surveillance that discipline them and produce them as 'good' citizens, in gendered, sexualized, racial, and class terms" (p. xxvii). This illustrates that the migration control system functions not only as a means to delimit the nation and citizenship but also as a site of normalization that aims to ensure a "proper" sexual and gender order (Luibhéid and Cantú 2005).

Recognizing the imbrications between migration policies and public discourses and perceptions about migrants and migrations, in this chapter I show how discursive constructions of Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex trade as dangerous figures or passive victims translate into restrictive migration regulations and controls that have effects on the daily life experiences of these migrants. I will explain how these restrictions and controls are implemented, and I will analyze how migrant women respond to them.

Migrants in the sex trade: dangerous figures or passive victims

Images, fears, and anxieties about Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex sector cannot be separated from the larger process of Colombian and Peruvian migration into Ecuador and the imageries and fears that these migration flows have brought about in Ecuadorian society. In chapter 1, I analyzed some of the negative mental images and concerns people in El Oro associate to Peruvian and Colombian migrants, such as labor displacement and raising delinquency rates. I also explained that female prostitution is often part of media accounts and other popular discourses about trans-border migrations into Ecuador. This activity, which is linked to immorality and criminality, is hypervisibilized and presented as evidence of the multiple "social problems" that migration flows generate in destination countries.

In this section, I focus on the particular concerns that the presence of migrant women in the local sex industry provokes among Ecuadorians in El Oro, and I analyze the two main discourses about this migrant group.

"Disease" and "illegality"

In the border province of El Oro, the presence of Peruvian and Colombian women in the sex trade did not attract much public attention until the early 2000s. Moreover, regulations and controls targeting migrant sex workers were inexistent. Consequently, migrants were only required to show an identity card to get access to medical checkups and the "prophylactic card" that allowed them to legally work in brothels and nightclubs; neither passports nor visas were needed in this process. But as migration flows kept augmenting, migrants in the sex trade became one of the groups that journalists and local authorities spotlighted, sometimes replacing the fears and rejection local street-based sex workers had provoked in earlier times.

Indeed, while some Ecuadorian men have fantasized about and even celebrated the presence of Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex sector, larger groups in El Oro have condemned their presence and depicted them as dangerous figures. This negative portrayal traveled throughout the province as migration flows increased and media accounts warned about a "foreign invasion in [local] brothels."[2] As the following piece illustrates, health problems and more precisely "disease" and "infections" are at the center of many public discourses and representations of migrant women in the sex trade:

> …why is work allowed in brothels and nightclubs … of the province for countless numbers of foreign women, most of them from Colombia, who enter the country as tourists and later on work clandestinely, without working permits, without legalizing their stay, and, most critically, carrying documents or health cards without having undergone the required [medical] examinations. Citizens [of El Oro] demand an immediate response to this problem from the provincial governor because what is at stake is the health and life of hundreds of men, who daily attend to these dumps in search of leisure and sex. … [These men] are in danger of

> getting infected with any kind of sexually transmitted disease, especially AIDS that has had a significant boost in our province.[3]

Images that link migrant women in the sex sector with "disease," "infection," and "contagion" are strongly related to others about "illegality" and "clandestinity." In fact, the image of the "clandestine prostitute"—one that avoids regulations and medical examinations—has been historically used as synonymous with "contagion" and "sexually transmitted diseases," and it has served as an argument to implement tighter control strategies (Nencel 2000). What makes "clandestine prostitutes" and "illegal migrants" particularly threatening is the fact that they both escape state control, and in so doing they are perceived as "invaders" that "penetrate" and "contaminate" the social body. Accordingly, citizens' bodies and the limits of the nation-state are perceived as equally exposed to "foreign prostitutes."

Judged as outlaws, Colombian and Peruvian women in the sex sector are constantly viewed with suspicion. They are accused of holding false documents, working with delinquents, and engaging in risky sexual behavior. The linkages between foreign women in the sex trade and disease and criminality, however, are not based on "objective" data. Statistics on these issues are scarce and those available contradict these fears.[4] Yet these negative images are reproduced not only by local media but also by organized Ecuadorian sex workers in Machala, the capital of El Oro, who have a long tradition of fighting for the rights and non-stigmatization of women in the sex industry. According to some of these local women, Colombians and Peruvians have "harmed the labor site" (*dañan la plaza*) because they charge clients less and they agree to engage in unsafe sex.[5] Furthermore, Ecuadorian sex workers, just as other local workers, consider that foreigners' labor rights should be limited as a means to protect the national labor force.

Consequently, to safeguard the health, economic stability, and safety of "our own people," control of and restrictions to the "dangerous others" are publicly

demanded and then implemented in brothels and barras-bar where migrant women are working.

Discourses about "illegal migrants" and "clandestine prostitutes" are often naturalized and thus constructed as signs of an "irresponsible" and "improper" individual character. I argue, in contrast, that both migrants' "illegality" and sex workers' "clandestinity" are constituted by the power of the law and sustained by discursive strategies that emerge in particular political contexts. As the following section illustrates, restrictive and selective migration regulations "produce" an ever-increasing group of "illegal" or unauthorized migrants.[6] Similarly, formal and informal regulations of commercial sexual activities adopted in Ecuador have "produced" two groups of women offering sexual services: one is an authorized group principally made up by Ecuadorians and very young women that are admitted in sex businesses with state permits; the other group consists of non-authorized workers, such as street-based sex workers and migrants with an irregular migration status.

Criminal "mafias", "unrestricted migrations," and sex trafficking victims

Since the beginning of this century, migrant women engaged in the sex trade—whether Ecuadorians in Europe and other industrialized countries or Colombians and Peruvians in Ecuador—have been depicted as victims of human trafficking, a discourse that conflates commercial sex with criminal activities. Although trafficking is not a new problem, in Ecuador concerns about this issue are relatively recent, and understandings of this complex phenomenon have been largely limited to the idea of "forced prostitution" in the context of international migrations. This means that other forms and sites of exploitation and forced labor that are part of contemporary definitions of human trafficking[7], such as labor exploitation in the domestic service sector and the agricultural sector, tend to be ignored, and "what captures the minds and imaginations of the media, the general public and policy

makers remains the specter of women and children trafficked for purposes of sexual slavery" (Ditmore 2003: 2).

In Ecuador, as in numerous countries around the globe, human trafficking has become a central topic of interest for different social and political actors, such as national and local governments, human rights NGOs, journalists, feminist groups, migrants' organizations, international cooperation agencies, etc. The logics and interests of these groups have led to different conceptions of human trafficking (Piscitelli 2008a; Weitzer 2007). However, they have also led, with few exceptions, to very similar political agendas. Thus, trafficking is conceived as a problem of irregular migrations, morality, organized crime or violence against women and children. All of these conceptions justify restrictions and controls.

In contrast to the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, where even political parties have introduced the topic of human trafficking into their agendas, often with a sensationalistic approach,[8] concerns about trafficking have not been as widespread or dramatic in El Oro. Yet, in September 2006, during a fieldwork visit to the border city of Huaquillas, I noted that telephone cabins and other public places were covered with posters of a national anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling campaign launched by different government institutions and supported by international funds. The posters and messages of this campaign portrayed the unaccompanied movement of women across borders as an experience with multiple risks, including prostitution. Therefore, several billboards displayed images of weeping and downcast women and girls. One of them presented the face of a devastated-looking adult woman and included the following text: "*Sabes en que trabajo como migrante? Fui por un trabajo digno y ahora soy explotada sexualmente*" (Do you know what kind of work I do as a migrant? I went looking for a decent job, and now I am sexually exploited) (figure 7). In this and other billboards, women were depicted as objectified victims that had been affected for life: "I lost my identity, now I have a price," said another sign that displayed the exposed body of a female figure.[9] Accordingly, some of the campaign's messages discouraged international migrations, while simultaneously suggesting that one's

own country was the safer place to be. "*Sueña… hazlo en tu país*" (Dream… do it in your country), said one of the billboards of this campaign.

Figure 7. Anti-trafficking campaign poster in a telephone cabin of Huaquillas

Likewise, El Oro newspapers have published numerous articles about (sex) trafficking, revealing some of the social concerns that are often linked to this problem. A major concern is related to the presence of transnational "mafias" that deceive and force women into prostitution and whose activities are apparently facilitated by a "permeable border."[10] Newspaper accounts have also revealed concerns about the "distorted behavior" and "rebellious" attitudes of youngsters, females in particular, which is associated to premature sexual experiences that can potentially end up in trafficking cases.[11] In this sense, the security and morality of locals are seen as under threat in these trafficking narratives.

Discourses deployed by civil society organizations are similar in some aspects and different in others. While media accounts focus on trafficking gangs'

actions and police operations, migrants associations, religious organizations, and human rights NGOs working in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces pay more attention to the situation of trafficking victims. Nonetheless, many of these organizations also conflate trafficking with sex work.[12] Civil society organizations also emphasize the criminal aspects and effects of human trafficking rather than its structural causes, and they portray all women in the sex trade as passive victims who are "moved," "deceived," and "exploited" by evil individuals. The words of the leader of a migrants association in Machala illustrate some of these perceptions:

> There are Ecuadorian persons engaged in this [process], sometimes they bring them, sometimes they tell them that they will find them a well-paid job; they bring them, they take away their documents, they force them to work in their barras-bar.[13]

The rhetoric surrounding human trafficking in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces suggests an alarming incidence of this phenomenon in the country. This rhetoric, however, is supported by individual cases and dramatic stories and not by accurate statistical information. In fact, official statistics on trafficking of persons in Ecuador are scarce, dubious (sources of information are unclear, for example), and with high levels of underreporting. In Machala, for instance, the district attorney's office registered 98 reports of human trafficking and sexual exploitation (with no distinction between these two problems[14]) between 2005 and 2010. This means an average of 17 cases per year, most of them affecting underage persons.[15] Although I must insist that underreporting is very significant in these official statistics, and that there are probably five or even ten times as many trafficking cases in Ecuadorian cities, my point here is that concerns about trafficking are based not on striking figures but rather on sensationalist media coverage, alarmist campaigns, and on national and international reports that depict Ecuador as a "favorable site for criminal organizations" and thus for human trafficking.[16] Ecuador's proximity to Colombia, and thus to its armed conflict and illegal drug trade certainly influences these international concerns.

One of the international reports that have raised the alarm about human trafficking in Ecuador is the U.S Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Since 2004, U.S. TIP reports have characterized Ecuador as a "source, transit and destination" for trafficking victims, primarily sexually exploited women and children. In these reports, trafficking is directly linked to "lax border controls" and, since 2008, a lenient visa policy (that year, Ecuador lifted its tourist visa requirements for citizens all over the world) that "has resulted in a heavy influx of migrants into the country, some of whom may be trafficked" (U.S Department of State 2009: 124).

The U.S Department of State's TIP reports, as well as other international reports regarding trafficking in Ecuador,[17] have put political pressure on the Ecuadorian government to implement legal reforms and other relevant anti-trafficking measures.[18] Simultaneously, international agencies have financed various anti-trafficking programs and projects in Ecuador. According to a press release of the U.S embassy in Ecuador, "the U.S government has contributed with more than 93 million US dollars in the war against drug and human trafficking."[19] This shows that "combating" of (sex) trafficking is part of a broader security agenda that includes the fight against different "illicit," such as drug smuggling, "illegal migrations," and commercial sex. In this "global security agenda"—in which the role of the U.S. government is central[20]—different forms of control, such as the "increase [of] police raids in brothels" (U.S. Department of State 2008, 2009) and other spaces of the sex sector that are perceived as sites of criminality, are encouraged.

Alarmist messages and punitive measures (stringent laws, controls, restrictions) implemented as part of anti-trafficking operations often have negative effects in the lives of those that they are supposed to protect, as other studies have already shown (see for example Andrijasevic 2003). Likewise, the "panic about trafficking" has had important repercussions on national, regional, and international agendas on sexual commerce and cross-border migrations. In the first

case, abolitionist and prohibitionist positions have gained momentum (Sha 2008; Bernstein 2008), while in the second, a "securitist" approach has guided debates on and policies towards international migrations (Magliano and Clavijo 2011).

Before closing this section, it is worth noting that discourses about migrant women in the sex industry as trafficking victims and those that portray them as dangerous figures are not as different or opposite as they seem to be. Both discourses attach negative imagery to female sexuality: migrant sex workers are constructed as dangerous or threatening figures because their active sexuality is connected to disease, infections, contagion, and public disturbances; similarly, representations of migrant women as passive victims of sex trafficking link female sexuality to violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Consequently, in both cases restrictive laws, controls and surveillance measures are adopted. Furthermore, when migrants in the sex industry are portrayed as deviants or devastated victims, their voices, opinions, and arguments are not taken into consideration, neither in governmental and non-governmental studies nor in the formulation of public policy.

Restricting migrations, selecting migrants

The Ecuadorian state has responded to recent migration flows into the country in changing and even contradictory ways, reflecting the different positions public institutions and state actors have with respect to migration issues in different historical contexts. The contrast between the inclusive provisions that were incorporated in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution in relation to migrant populations—guided by the principles of "free movement" and "universal citizenship"—and the securitist and restrictive approach of Ecuador's 1971 migration and alien laws (which are still in place) illustrates this contradiction. In this section, I show that, in practice, the views of the earlier laws guide the Ecuadorian state's responses towards trans-border migrants.

Until 2005, Ecuadorian migration law included overt exclusionary provisions in relation to foreigners that disregarded official moral and sexual orders. One of these provisions stated that those "who contravene morality and proper mores, prostitutes or those who intend to introduce them into the country, people who live at their expense or accompany them" will not be eligible to obtain a visa and should be excluded when demanding admission into the country.[21] This legal clause, however, was rarely implemented. Tolerance towards commercial sexual activities and the limited impact of migration flows in Ecuador could explain this situation.

Ecuador's migration and alien laws were inspired by the principles of "national security" that prevailed during the 1970s in the context of South American dictatorships. These laws, partially modified in 2005, are enforced by the ministries of Interior (migration control) and Foreign Relations (foreigners' permanence and residency regulation). In recent years, more specific migration regulations complementing these laws have been introduced in order to respond to the increasing migration flows arriving in the country. These regulations contain exclusionary provisions based on class, nationality, and sexuality. Issues concerning sexuality, however, are referred to in more covert and subtle terms, usually associated with (il)licitness, public order, and internal security.

Indeed, since 2004, a series of restrictive migration regulations were implemented by the Ecuadorian state. These regulations included: selective work opportunities for highly-skilled migrant workers[22]; higher visa costs; supplementary requirements for resident visa procedures, such as compulsory HIV tests, and higher fines for visitors overstaying the 90-day period allowed by the Andean Migration Card. Although many of these restrictive regulations were modified or eliminated shortly after, other measures, guided by a similar rationale, were implemented in subsequent years.

In May 2004, a legal provision was adopted exclusively for Colombian border crossers. This provision requires Colombian citizens entering Ecuador to

present a clean police record. Different Ecuadorian actors criticized this measure, arguing that it not only contradicts sub-regional integration accords adopted by the Community of Andean Nations (CAN) but it also criminalizes Colombian citizens. The minister of foreign affairs responded to this criticism by assuring the general public that the adoption of this and other measures to control migration flows coming from neighboring countries were "not intended to disturb honorable and good-intentioned people, investors, students, tourists, capitalists."[23] Rather, these measures aimed to prevent the entry of "negative" and "immoral people, delinquents, or terrorists."[24]

Restrictive and selective regulations as the ones above and others that were implemented more recently certainly limit the possibilities of unskilled and low-income migrant workers; irregular migration flows have increased as a result. Estimates vary considerably, but it is likely that at least 500,000 Colombians and 300,000 Peruvians with an irregular migration status are living in Ecuador.[25]

To respond to unauthorized labor migrations coming from Colombia and Peru, Ecuadorian authorities have implemented two regularization programs that offer short-term work visas to unskilled workers. These programs, however, have been exclusively directed at workers with work contracts and engaged in "licit activities."[26] This excludes the majority of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in Ecuador who are self-employed, especially women who largely engage in informal, non-regulated, or unrecognized economic sectors. The few migrant women working in domestic services under contract are an exception. In contrast, migrant women offering sexual services in brothels and nightclubs have been excluded because the activities they engage in, although not considered illegal by Ecuadorian laws, they are perceived as "illicit" (immoral, problematic, dangerous) from a social and moral perspective and, thus, not apt for regularization, as several public officers have explained.[27] Migrants working in barras-bar, an activity that is seen as "clandestine prostitution," face a similar situation.

Consequently, having family ties with Ecuadorian citizens or legal residents is the only genuine opportunity for unskilled and low-income migrants to

regularize their migration status and apply for a permanent resident visa. In point of fact, during my fieldwork, I found that the few Colombian and Peruvian women who held regular migration status had managed to do so basically through a *visa de amparo*, a "support" or family reunification visa.[28] To get access to this document, my informants had to demonstrate either that they maintained a stable, state-legalized relationship with an Ecuadorian man or that they had a child born in Ecuador (who automatically acquires the Ecuadorian nationality due to the *iu solis* principle that rules in this country). In both cases, and although migrants with this type of visa are allowed to work, these women were also asked to present an economic guarantee certificate, proving that the "supporting citizen" (assumed to be the husband or the father of the child) had sufficient funds to provide for her expenses in Ecuador.

Thus, being a "supported" migrant woman facilitates access to regularization, while simultaneously reproducing a normative gender and sexual order in which women are supposed to be economically dependent, heterosexual, procreative, and attached to a nuclear family. The importance that family reunification processes have acquired in recent years also reveals that the migration system grants preferred admission to wives and mothers, and in contrast excludes or presents greater difficulties to single women and especially sex workers and other "immoral" women. In other words, sexual hierarchies[29] are sustained by the migration system.

Yet the lines separating regular and irregular migration statuses are neither stable nor definitive: holding a resident visa while being the wife of a citizen does not prevent exclusions and not even the possibility of becoming "illegal" in the future. Ecuador's alien law states that legal residency obtained through marriage is terminated in case of divorce.[30] Therefore, even if some migrants see marriage as the only opportunity for legalization, are already married to Ecuadorian citizens also perceive it as a factor that makes them dependent on and susceptible to being controlled by their husbands, as Dayana's story illustrates below. Further, in recent

years, Ecuadorian authorities enacted a series of measures to control "arranged marriages" between nationals and foreigners, one of which is the cancelation of resident visas and naturalization documentation to those migrants that "prostituted the sacred institution of marriage" to obtain citizens' rights in Ecuador (chapter 6).

Nonetheless, migration regulations change rapidly because they depend on fluctuating political contexts and interests. Moreover, with a global agenda that intends to adequately "govern" migrations taking into consideration human right issues, opposing discourses and regulations towards migrations coexist (Domenech 2011). This means that policies based on notions of protection and inclusion are not necessarily opposite to those relying on notions of security, control, and exclusion. These apparently conflicting policies can come together in regulations that, for example, control and exclude in order to achieve "orderly migrations" and protect the most "vulnerable" groups of migrants.

Thus, since 2007, the government of Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa visibilized migration in the national public agenda[31] and connected it to development, integration, and human rights issues.[32] Within this context, in June 2008, the requirement that Colombian citizens present a clean police record was abolished because it was at odd with the principle of free movement of persons of the Ecuadorian Constitution. In the same year and following the same principle, the Ecuadorian government lifted visa requirements for tourists from every country in the world. However, national and international critics of these measures, the pressure of political adversaries and the connections that some national authorities still make between migration flows and national (in)security caused Correa's government to partially or wholly retract various of the inclusive measures directed at migrants and refugees arriving in Ecuador. Therefore, the requirement of a clean police record for Colombian citizens was re-instated in December 2008 as a way to "combat the eventual entry of delinquents" and criminal organizations from Colombia.[33] Likewise, tourist visas were re-imposed on the citizens of some Asian and African countries in September 2010, with the argument of protecting migrants and potential migrants from human smuggling and trafficking.

Protection and exclusion also coexist in migration legislation adopted at the sub-regional level. The Andean Labor Migration Instrument adopted in 2003 is aimed at guaranteeing the rights of Andean laborers working in CAN member states, but it implicitly excludes women migrating in order to work in the sex industry. Even though adult sex work is legal in all Andean countries, moral, sexual, health, and national security concerns guide a restrictive clause of the Andean Labor Migration instrument. This clause says: "Excluded from its sphere of application are … those whose activities threaten public morals, law and order, human life and health, and the essential interests of national security."

Daily practices of migration and border control

My informants recounted that migration controls in Ecuador tend to shift between periods of calm and flexibility to periods of continuous harassment by local control authorities. These changes certainly depend on political conjunctures and public discourses guiding perceptions about migrants and migrations. "During my first years in this country, controls were scarce," said Dayana, who arrived in Ecuador in 2000 and directly engaged in brothels and nightclubs in this country. "Although I didn't have papers during those first years, I used to work without too many problems; but then controls increased," she added.

I want to highlight four aspects of the migration control practices of El Oro. First, daily life migration controls are not restricted to the Huaquillas-Aguas Verdes borderline or to migration control posts along these two border cities; on the contrary, surveillance and control practices have extended inside this border province and even into cities of the Ecuadorian interior. Second, migration controls are selective and they principally affect Colombian and Peruvian citizens (and not, for example, Chinese migrants living in the province), impoverished workers, and women in the sex trade. Third, although a special group of police officers are in charge of migration control (the migration police), migrants are put

under a wider network of surveillance that includes multiple public and private actors: health authorities (in the case of migrants in the sex trade), employers, local co-workers, journalists, hotel managers,[34] among others (see figure 8). Fourth, migration controls targeting women in the sex industry are not based on formal legislation, which is virtually inexistent; rather, local regulations and the discretionary decisions of low ranking migration officials, often based on individual prejudices, guide the implementation of daily life migration controls.

Figure 8. A billboard signed by an Ecuadorian diplomat and a local transport company warns about migrants´ unauthorized work

Robert Chang (1999) has pointed out that "heightened anxieties about policing the territorial border have translated into heightened anxieties about policing those *within* the territory" (quoted by Luibhéid 2002: xviii). This argument applies well to the Ecuador–Peru border. Controls do not take place along the border anymore as a result of the 1998 Ecuador–Peru peace accord and the creation of a "free transit zone" in the border towns of these two countries (chapter 1). Still, control of the border has not disappeared, but it has acquired new forms and logics. These controls are not focused on defending the national territory, as during the border

conflict with Peru; instead, they intend to regulate "disorder" and "combat" the supposed "threats" resulting from regional integration projects.

Thus, in El Oro, migration and military control posts (the latter are in charge of controlling goods' smuggling) begin precisely where the free transit zone ends, that is, around ten kilometers away from the border. These control posts have been complemented by other checkpoints in a nearby and concentrated area: the "customs surveillance service," which today is more specialized and strict than in times of the Ecuador–Peru territorial conflict, and the anti-narcotics control post, set up in 2006 with United States' funds. The links between drug and migration controls, which I mentioned earlier, are evinced by the frequent detentions of undocumented migrants in this anti-narcotics control post, where personal documents and belongings are carefully scrutinized by a specialized police group: *Grupo Especial Móvil Anti-narcóticos* (GEMA). In this and other control posts, public transport travelers are more heavily policed than private vehicle users, as I personally confirmed while moving around the province.[35]

While I was writing this dissertation, a new international bridge, the "Peace Bridge", was opened few kilometers away from the old Huaquillas-Aguas Verdes international bridge. This new bridge introduced a new and "modern" logic of border control in which different control operations (of people, transport and goods) concentrate on the Binational Border Service Centers (*Centros Binacionales de Atención de Frontera, CEBAF*), that started to operate since 2011. Despite this, traditional forms of border control persist around the old international bridge. Local and national authorities have maintained these older and more dispersed forms of border control, including certain checkpoints, as a way to prevent the informal and illegal activities taking place across the numerous clandestine crossing points that exist between Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes.

The work of Robert Chang also shows that the implementation of controls and exclusionary measures is often guided by the "bodily figurative borders" carried by migrants and ethnic minorities. The author focuses on citizens of Asian

origin in the United States, whom certain control authorities view with suspicion because they take the ethnic and racial characteristics of these citizens as marks of their foreignness and hence a reason to restrain and exclude them, despite migration status or citizenship. In the Ecuadorian migration context, these types of exclusionary practices function differently.

Colombian and Peruvian migrants do not necessarily carry "bodily figurative borders" in the ethnic and racial context of Ecuador, because ethnically, racially, and linguistically they can hardly be differentiated from Ecuadorians. Therefore, migration officials have a hard time discerning who are "locals and who are "foreigners." To do so, they rely on personal perceptions and social prejudices, such as ideas about the "typical" physical appearance and personality of Colombians and Peruvians. Some officials also rely on national symbols in order to supposedly reveal who is and who is not a national. One way they do this is asking those whom they perceive as foreigners to sing the national anthem.

Other sites where migration control frequently takes place in El Oro are popular markets, cheap hotels, and especially brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar. The latter are perceived by local authorities as *lugares de riesgo* (risky locations) due to the "immoral" and "criminal" activities that supposedly occur in these places.

Punishing, disciplining, and "protecting" through exclusionary measures

The negative hypervisibilization of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the Ecuadorian sex sector motivated national and local authorities to tighten controls toward this migrant group. In El Oro, the first restrictions were ordered by the governor of the province and implemented by health authorities in Machala and other big cities of the province. These restrictions started in late 2003, and they consisted in closing access to medical checkups and "prophylactic cards" to migrant women without labor or resident permits. As a consequence, a relation was cemented between the irregular migration status of working-class Colombian and

Peruvian women, produced by selective and restrictive migration policies, and the "illegality" and "clandestinity" of their work.

Since 2004, police raids increased in brothels and nightclubs to prevent the presence of *ilegales*. According to some business owners in El Oro, tens of Colombian and Peruvian women without work permits were detained and deported by migration authorities between 2004 and 2005. "Colombians were especially searched for," a brothel owner told me. "Officials used to come and look for them even under the beds." According to some of my informants, some of these police raids in brothels and nightclubs were a result of being denounced by local sex workers.

While some business owners took advantage of migration restrictions and controls, and they asked irregular migrants for bribes in order to keep them working in their businesses, others preferred to avoid problems with local authorities and simply stopped hiring this group of women. Furthermore, when controls increased, some business owners preferred not to accept foreign women altogether, or, as a brothel owner explained, they hired "*solo las que han jurado la bandera*" (only those who have sworn allegiance to the Ecuadorian flag), i.e., only migrants who have obtained the Ecuadorian nationality. Hence, business owners contribute to migration control, and their informal practices reproduce differences and hierarchies between nationals and non-nationals.

From 2005 onward, migration controls also increased in barras-bar. These controls are carried out as part of anti-delinquency operations. Therefore, they involve not only migration police officers but also other state agents. In these operations, as in police raids in brothels and nightclubs, migrant women who lack working permits are detained, imprisoned, and often deported, and their names and faces are exhibited in the crime section of local newspapers, as shown in figure 9).[36] Thus, newspaper articles reproduce mental associations with criminality that affect migrant women working in the sex sector and make Peruvian and Colombian women suspect. Moreover, well-publicized and selectively targeted migration

controls produce a "spectacle"—the law enforcement spectacle, in the words of Nicholas De Genova—that renders migrant illegality visible and serves to confirm the notion that there really is a "foreign invasion in brothels and barras-bar" after all. In this sense, "immigration law enforcement is deployed selectively, 'preventively', indeed 'preemptively' in the production of pretexts for surveillance and detention" of particular migrant groups (De Genova 2007: 434).

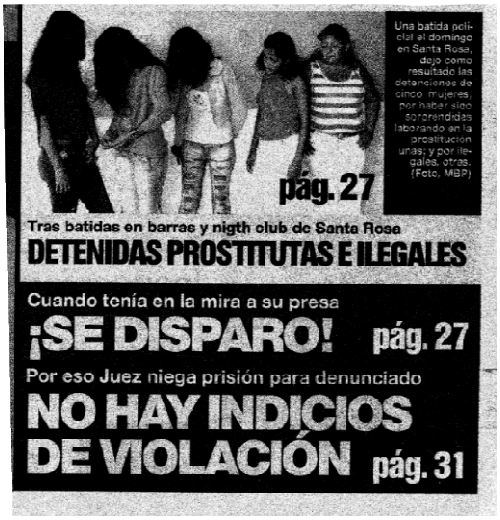

Figure 9. Detentions of "prostitutes and illegal migrants" in the crime section of a local newspaper

But controls and police measures do not only affect irregular migrants in the sex trade. Migration police officers, who, according to the Ecuadorian Migration Law, have "ample and discretionary faculties" to "limit and control the permanence of foreigners in national territory" (article 5), also detain and exclude women with resident visas. To validate this measure and defend the idea that foreign women are not or "should not be allowed in the sex sector," as a local officer told me, migration officials draw on "common sense" rather than legal arguments, such as the need to protect morality, public health, public order, and differentiated rights between national and non-national women.

Hence, although I interviewed migration officials who acknowledged that adult prostitution is a tolerated activity in Ecuador, some of them also suggested that, due to the particular and risky nature of this activity, it should only be allowed to Ecuadorian women. A former migration police chief of the El Oro province justified this restrictive measure under the argument that it has preventive and self-protective ends. "It's not possible to support a foreign person working in prostitution," he said in relation to migrant women with "support" or family reunification visas found in brothels and nightclubs. "As Ecuadorians, we should learn to protect ourselves and prevent this from coming about."[37] Hence, some migration officials threaten regularized migrants and recognized refugee women with the loss of their legal status if they do not leave the sex sector, as some of my informants assured me. In this way, government officials use their discretionary power to discipline foreigners and transform them into "good" and "moral" citizens.

What I want to emphasize is that control policies directed at "illegal migrants" and "immoral foreigners" have taken place in parallel or mixed up with policies focused on "combating" human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children. When the Ecuadorian government, in August 2004, declared the "combat of trafficking and sexual exploitation" a "public policy priority,"[38] anti-trafficking actions burgeoned (although disperse and with limited funding), including stricter and more frequent police raids and "rescue operations" in sex businesses.

But despite the human rights language used in anti-trafficking initiatives, "rescue operations" in brothels and nightclubs demonstrate that state officials clearly distinguish between "innocent" underage victims and "guilty" adult migrants (Chapkis 2003). While women of the first group are conceived of primarily in relation to their vulnerability, blamelessness, and purity (or sexless nature), which make them deserving of protection, women of the second group are fundamentally seen as "illegal workers" and therefore policed and excluded. A

report of the Ecuadorian Ombudsman office confirms this argument (DPE 2010a), as does the story of one of my informants.

Sherly, a 33-year-old undocumented Colombian migrant, complains about the "abusive" police raids that often take place in brothels and nightclubs of El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces. She says that these controls often include demands for bribes from police officers and other local authorities and sometimes also physical aggressions (pulls, shoves, and even punches) during detentions. One of Sherly's worst experiences took place in 2007, during a police operation intended to rescue an adolescent forcibly working in a nightclub. According to this migrant, in those police raids "*caen las que son y las que no son*." In other words, migrant women can be removed from their working place, detained, and deported whether or not they are victims of trafficking. In a telephone conversation, she narrated her experience in this way:

> That day I had just started to work and suddenly the police arrived. People said that they came because there was a report about a minor [working in the nightclub]. And for this reason, the police detained many other women, no matter if you were part of the problem or not. I was detained for three days and then deported. […] The police officers took pictures of me, pictures, as if I was a criminal!

Focusing on the South American context, Magliano and Clavijo (2011) explain that the conception of human trafficking as an "abusive form of migration" has not only legitimized notions of migrations as a "problem" and "threat." This conception has also stimulated the design of a regional migration agenda that includes control and security as guiding postulates, in spite of or together with protection and human rights discourses.

Consequently, measures aiming to "rescue" and "protect" trafficking victims and those attempting to control "dangerous" foreign sex workers have, in daily life, very similar forms and almost identical results. In both cases, migrants in the sex trade are linked to criminal activities or directly criminalized themselves, removed from sex businesses through "rescue" or "anti-delinquency operations",

and sent back to their origin countries. This shows that the status of "victim" does not relieve migrant women in the sex trade from the prostitute or "whore stigma." Moreover, my work shows that constructions of migrants in the sex trade as simultaneously "sex trafficking victims," "foreign prostitutes," and "illegal migrants" position them as "reproachable victims" (Jacobsen and Skilbrei 2010) who deserve controls and exclusions.

What I have attempted to show in this chapter is that anti-trafficking, anti-migration, and anti-prostitution policies converge, as do sexual regimes and migration controls more broadly. This is because the female body is the site where control over gender, control over sexuality, and control over the nation meet (Mayer 2000). Accordingly, migration restrictions and border control targets sexually "threatening" or sexually "threatened" women as a way to reestablish the dreamed orderly nation.

According to Berman (2003), who analyzes discursive and control practices around sex trafficking in the European Union, women's autonomous movement across borders and the lurid stories about their "enslavement" and "sexual exploitation" by criminal organizations have actually problematized the state's ability to control borders and bodies at a historical moment when the state is under considerable duress from forces associated with globalization and regionalization. Therefore, the criminal aspects that are highlighted in discourses about sex trafficking—and, I would add, those that refer to migrant women in the sex trade as deviants and "*ilegales*"—provide a site in which the state seeks to regain control and sovereignty. This is done by passing stringent laws to combat (sex) trafficking and indirectly commercial sex, policing borders, and deporting migrant women back to their "proper homes." In this way, both territorial borders as well as national and sexual boundaries are redrawn in a context of growing migrations, economic transformations, and regional integration processes that provoke a sense of "crisis" and "loss of control."

In the Andean sub-region of South America the process described above has some particularities. Here, visa-free entry accords, "regional threats" connected to the Colombian armed conflict, and increasing movements across "permeable borders" have triggered a series of fears about people coming from "the other side." These fears are particularly salient in Ecuador, a country that has received significant numbers of Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the last 14 or 15 years, motivating migration restrictions and border controls that are justified in the name of "national security" and the protection of "vulnerable" migrants.

Effects of and responses to migration control

Despite the force of the migration control system as a "modern form of state power" (Luibhéid 2002), this system is not definitive, completely coherent, or totally efficient (De Genova 2002; Van Schendel 2005). State efforts to control and exclude certain groups of migrants are in permanent tension with migrants' strategies to evade controls and find spaces of inclusion. This means that migration regulations and controls do not necessarily stop migration movements, although they have unintended consequences and often negative effects in migrants' daily life experiences (Andrijasevic 2009; Cornelius 2001).

Apart from the increase of irregular migration flows, restrictive migration policies and strict border controls adopted by Ecuadorian authorities have resulted in detentions and deportations that, despite ups and downs, have augmented since the early years of this century. According to a baseline study on the situation of the Colombian population in Ecuador, migrant sex workers, particularly Colombians, represent 70% of all foreign women affected by deportation processes (Benavides 2008). Likewise, NGOs working on migration issues have documented the abuses against unauthorized Colombian and Peruvian migrants in Ecuador, such as extortions and labor exploitation (Coalición 2007, 2009).

In the sex sector, law enforcement tends to work hand in hand with a tolerated entertainment industry that has an important demand for sexualized

foreign women from customers. Further, controls and deportations of migrant sex workers are frequently used as mechanisms to maintain the turnover of women in the sex trade, as discussed in chapter 2. In all this process, migrants in the sex trade are subjects that deploy different strategies to prevent state interference from ruining their migration projects.

My ethnographic work showed that Colombian and Peruvian women in El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces maneuver in a particular context. Geographic proximity and the lack of tourist visa requirements facilitate these migrants' border-crossings, while linguistic, cultural, and ethnic proximity between citizens of Andean countries allow Peruvians and Colombians to "pass" as Ecuadorians and, consequently, to avoid identification by control authorities. Therefore, many circular and temporary migrant workers express little interest in engaging in long bureaucratic processes to obtain labor permits, and they prefer to ignore restrictive migration requirements.

But as law enforcement becomes stricter and controls, detentions, and deportations increase, Colombian and Peruvian women with an irregular migration status find it more difficult to move across the border autonomously. In point of fact, those among my informants who had experienced detentions or deportations preferred to rely on the support of Ecuadorian friends and acquaintances or pay for private transportation to ensure their safe relocation from the borderline to their working places in Ecuador. But this meant that their movements across the border became more costly and more dependent on third parties.

Other Peruvian and Colombian migrants lacking resident visas and thus unable to get the other required documents to legally work in brothels and nightclubs often negotiate with police officers and business owners, or they move from one business to another to evade controls. A similar strategy was adopted by regularized migrants affected by exclusionary migration policies, especially in bigger and central cities in Ecuador. The story of Dayana shows that moving to small towns and working in remote brothels or bars, where surveillance is less

frequent, is one of the ways of escaping migration controls. However, women that adopt this strategy are confronted with especially precarious working conditions, such as lower fees, longer working hours, and insecure working places.

I met Dayana in a small city of El Oro. In our first meeting she complained about migration controls and the fact that Ecuadorian authorities "*no dejan trabajar*" (do not allow [foreign] women to work [in the sex trade]). "In other countries it is not so strict," she told me in a following meeting, and she said that she had worked without problems in brothels and nightclubs in Panama and The Netherlands. Dayana acknowledged that having a resident visa gave her the opportunity to work in big and elegant nightclubs of Quito and other big cities of Ecuador, where earnings are usually higher. When I met her, though, she was working in a modest but less controlled brothel because she was experiencing the same problems she had when she was an irregular migrant. "When I worked without documents, there were moments where migration officers arrived [to the businesses] and you had to fuck them for free or otherwise they would take you to prison," she said. Surprisingly, with a resident visa Dayana was confronting similar abuses and restrictions, and this affected not only her working conditions but also her economic situation:

> Here [Ecuador], they don't let us [Colombians] work anymore. Police officials arrive [at brothels and nightclubs] and they detain all the [foreign] girls. I have had to hide … and as owners don't want to allow foreign women [in their businesses], I been forced to work in *chongos*,[39] where I get only five dollars for a trick …. I don't like to work in those places where you have to use a bikini. In the places I worked before, you dress elegantly. But now I have to go to those [cheap] places because, as they don't let us work, I've been starting to have debts.

Controls targeting migrant women in the sex industry have negative effects on their daily lives, but they do not necessarily stop migrants' involvement in this industry. The economic difficulties many of these migrants are faced with due to working restrictions and bribes that take away money from their savings force them to remain in the industry and engage in high intensity erotic labor (working in

brothels during daytime and then in nightclubs, for example); in this way they face family responsibilities, send money back home, and continue with their migration projects. Dayana, for instance, had to keep working despite controls because she had to support her nine-year-old son and send the monthly payments for the house she was building in her hometown, Barranquilla. In order to change her poor working conditions in the sex trade, Dayana decided to obtain the Ecuadorian nationality and to continue her conflictive relationship with her Ecuadorian husband until she "became" Ecuadorian herself:

> My husband is a trader. He neither gives me nor takes away [my money]. He asks me to leave this work, but he doesn't support me economically. … Sometimes he humiliates me, he threatens with divorce, but I don't say anything at all because he has to sign the naturalization documents. I want to get those documents so that I am allowed to work [in brothels and nightclubs]. Only with Ecuadorian documents is it possible to work in good places.

Establishing intimate relationships with Ecuadorian men is one way migrant women respond to daily life difficulties in Ecuador. I will explore these intimate relationships in chapter 6, stressing that they constitute sites where Colombians and Peruvians involved in the sex sector exercise agency and manage their vulnerabilities in an exclusionary context. I will make clear, though, that these relationships can also reproduce traditional gender roles, as these women indulge men and offer themselves sexually in exchange for their protection and support.

Similarly, Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador respond to and evade migration regulations, but they also adapt to and uphold these restrictive and selective regulations. As the story of Dayana shows, marrying "nationals" or "becoming nationals" themselves is one of the few alternatives some migrants have to access labor rights and permanent residency. In this process, however, migrants reproduce national hierarchies and thus hierarchical forms of citizenship.

Therefore, Luibhéid (2002) argues that migrant women's agency in regard to migration controls can be conceptualized through the analysis of repetition.

Relying on the work of Judith Butler, Luibhéid explains that repeating (social and legal) norms "means that one is not free to refuse, yet there is always the possibility of repeating in ways that challenge the dominant order" (p. 142). This means that women's agency in regard to migration control policies is exercised through the possibilities presented by the "repeating against the grain" of official migration-service requirements. Although Luibhéid recognizes the limits of these migrants' strategies, because "parodying [or accommodating to] dominant norms is not enough to displace them" (quoting Butler, p. 144), she also acknowledges that these strategies possess subversive potential. For instance, producing documents, answers, information, and forms of appearance that conform to migration service requirements, as some migrant women excluded on the basis of sexuality, class, and nationality do, is a way of "repeating differently" and in so doing subverting exclusion. Likewise, marriages of convenience and forged papers, fuelled by restrictive migration regulations, are part of migrants' strategies to access rights in ways that contest an exclusionary order.

Concluding remarks

In the context of the border, migrant women in the sex trade are seen as "a more significant, more alien 'other'" (Donnan and Wilson 1998: 23), and this leads not only to a renewed emphasis on national and sexual hierarchies but also to material practices of border maintenance. I have shown that discursive constructions of migrants in the sex sector as "dangerous foreigners" or "sex trafficking victims" justify migration restrictions and controls, as well as protectionist policies that have similar exclusionary effects. In other words, controls over sexuality and women's bodies—their movements, moral behavior, health situation, etc.—and controls over migrations and borders have been implemented in parallel ways.

I have paid particular attention to anti-trafficking discourses and practices due to the importance they have acquired in understandings of migrant women in the sex industry and their influence in national and international public agendas

regarding migrations and sexual commerce. Public discourses on trafficking have not only portrayed the experiences of migrant women in the sex trade as homogeneously violent, oppressive, and connected to criminal "mafias"; these discourses have also reinforced traditional images of women as passive, vulnerable, and childlike (innocent and fragile) figures. As a consequence, they have incited the adoption of protectionist measures that aim to "save," "rescue," and guard the "dignity" (a concept often denoting sexual and moral integrity) of female victims and potential victims rather than protect their rights to move freely and access labor without being discriminated or abused due to their foreign and irregular migration status.

Further, anti-trafficking initiatives have, despite many good intentions, vindicated abusive controls in sex businesses and tighter migration restrictions and border controls. I have shown that these restrictions and controls do not prevent impoverished female workers from crossing borders and engaging in the sex industry. Rather, these restrictions drive this group of migrants further underground while making them more dependent on third parties and more vulnerable to abuses, detentions, and deportations.

In sum, in this chapter, I have illustrated the ways in which sexual concerns reinforce national borders and boundaries despite integration discourses and projects. In reality, the rhetoric of Latin American integration and the inclusionary principles of "free movement of persons" and "universal citizenship" of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution have been overshadowed by global securitist agendas that intend to "combat" illicit activities across borders, and also by nationalist ideologies and local discourses and practices guided by stigmatizing prejudices against migrant populations.

In contrast to dominant and homogenizing perceptions about migrant women involved in commercial sexual relations, in the two following chapters, I focus on migrant women's own accounts about their migration and erotic experiences in Ecuador.

CHAPTER 5

STRUGGLING OVER THE MEANINGS OF COMMERCIAL SEX

> …the exchange of goods and money for sexual services is not an unambiguous endeavor but a discursive construction that is contested and in motion, changing across time and space.
>
> —Amalia Cabezas (2009: 4)

> …immigrants redefine their experiences and the meanings of the erotic within contexts of racial, socioeconomic and gender inequality.
>
> —Gloria González-López (2005: 21)

Piedad, a 33-year-old Peruvian migrant, had difficulties explaining her engagement in the sex trade and labeling the activities she performs in brothels and nightclubs. One day she told me: "I used to hate women working like this. I thought they were whores because that's what is commonly believed. I used to say, 'how can they work like that if they can get a job in a house or somewhere else!'" Once involved in the Ecuadorian sex industry, however, Piedad—green eyes, dark hair, and a round body—started to contest derogative terms, stereotypes, and simplistic analyses about women's engagement in this industry. She recalled that when she arrived at Machala and started looking for jobs in "decent places" (restaurants, houses, hotels, etc.), salaries were so low that it was impossible to think of making a living in Ecuador while at the same time sending money to her family in Peru.

Thus, for Piedad, as well as for other migrant women I interviewed, their involvement in the sex trade was considered an income-generating activity and the only viable opportunity to accomplish their migration plans. Still, most of these migrants did not call themselves "sex workers" because they felt that this concept—commonly used in Machala and other cities of El Oro due to the

presence of a sex workers-led organization since the 1980s— implied permanent employment in this activity or a sort of "profession" that they did not identify with.

Contrasting with hegemonic discourses about migrant women in the sex trade, which often ignore the voices, arguments, and opinions of these women, in this chapter I explore migrants' subjective experiences and their own accounts about their involvement in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations. My purpose is twofold.

First, I want to explain how Peruvian and Colombian women's sexual practices and intimate experiences and the meanings they assign these experiences are informed by the context of migration, especially the opportunities, restrictions, and inequities this process entails. Second, I want to show that women's subjective meanings both depart from and contest hegemonic understandings of sexual commerce. Many of these migrants define their work as "not normal"; at the same time, their narratives put into question the victimizing images of women in the sex sector as passive and childlike, and they problematize the notion of "sex work(er)" that, despite its overarching meaning in political agendas and literature, does not always reflect the temporary, varied, and ambiguous intimate-material encounters women engage in.

As discussed in previous chapters, Colombian and Peruvian women in El Oro engage in different intimate-material relations: offering paid sex in brothels and nightclubs, dancing in erotic shows, accompanying former clients-boyfriends on trips and outings, and having sex with them in exchange for money or material support are part of these relations. Peruvian migrants also engage in eroticized services in barras-bar, where they serve drinks, accompany and dance with clients but without necessarily engaging in sex-for-money exchanges.

Consequently, conceptualizing these relationships is not an easy task and englobing all of them under a single notion can be misguided. The stories I present illustrate that migrant women in the sex industry face a series of paradoxes and contradictions that are accommodated by narratives that attempt to make their

engagement meaningful while counteracting the negative images of women involved in this industry.

In her study of sexualized tourism in the Caribbean, Cabezas (2004, 2009) shows that the ways people talk about their lives and experiences often bring about nuances and liminalities that are not always reflected in popular discourses and not even in analytical categories. Further, the meanings people attribute to their sexual practices cannot be specified in advance. These meanings depend on and change in relation to multiple factors, among them the social position of the participants (gender, class, migration status, etc.). For all these reasons, Cabezas argues that researchers' analysis should be connected to people's own understandings of their lives and experiences.

Likewise, Oerton and Phoenix (2001) argue that women involved in commercial sex and other intimate encounters often struggle over the meanings of these encounters, attempting to make sense of the tensions they experience in these types of relationships. Behind these struggles there is, in the first place, the understanding that "embodied, potentially erotic, intimate, physical encounters do not exist in and of themselves. They become meaningful only in the context of symbolically dense discursive terrains" (p. 357-358). Additionally, discursive struggles for meaning confirm the fact that sex is problematic for women, because if they are seen to be doing it outside a narrowly circumscribed set of contexts—namely with one man, in private, and as an expression of an altruistic emotional feeling—they risk imputations of disreputability and immorality. Thus, to ensure that being involved in erotic work and other intimate and physical encounters does not negatively impinge on their individual identities, women deploy diverse discursive strategies that illustrate that normative constructions of sexuality are "mapped on to, and yet simultaneously disavowed in the narrative accounts of women engaged in sex work and bodywork" (Oerton and Phoenix: 387).

But literature on the sex industry still pays limited attention to the influence that migration processes have on people's sexual practices and on their understandings of them. This gap has been addressed by recent migration literature

that offers a framework to conceptualize experiences of sexuality and intimacy in contexts of mobility. González-López (2005) and Hirsch (1999), who explore the sex lives of heterosexual Mexican migrants in the United States, highlight how sexuality changes with migration and across different generations, often in complex and non-linear fashions. These authors show how geographic distance, anonymity, softened family control, and paid employment offer women more space to live and experience their sexualities, while an uncertain legal status, economic segregation, ethnic or national origin-based exclusions impose new forms of control as well as a new socio-economic setting in which sexual experiences can acquire new meanings.

Thus, the work of González-López and Hirsch calls into question generalized and static beliefs about Latin women's sexual lives, which are often seen as solely and rigidly marked by Catholicism and *machismo*. These and other scholars argue that nowadays Latin American sexual and gender ideologies are influenced by the competing messages of different social institutions, such as the family, the church, school, and mass media, making the meanings and experiences of intimacy and sexuality multiple, fluid, contradictory, and vulnerable to the socioeconomic segregation that marks many migration processes. Along with these reflections, I will start by explaining how local ideologies and structural conditions inform the subjective experiences and meanings of Peruvian and Colombian migrants involved in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar in El Oro.

Redefining sexual commerce in a context of multiple exclusions

Migrants' experiences in the sex industry are heterogeneous and so are their own accounts about these experiences. A combination of factors, such as earnings, working conditions, and the different levels of social stigma attached to different businesses and activities in the sex industry, guide, in diverse and ambivalent ways,

migrant women's perceptions of and the meanings they attribute to their involvement in commercial sex and eroticized services.

Local constructions of commercial sex, and of sexuality more broadly, certainly inform women's own understandings about their engagement in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar. Peruvian and Colombian migrants in the Ecuadorian sex industry, especially those in brothels and nightclubs, define their work as "not normal" or "indecent." With these definitions, they endorse the "normal" or socially accepted boundaries of female sexuality, i.e., commitment to monogamous, stable, and loving heterosexual relationships taking place in the private sphere. But although my informants were not really concerned about virginity (in the case of single women) or about fidelity to a single man within marriage, as traditional messages of "ideal femininity" promote in some Latin American contexts, what distressed them was the idea of promiscuity.

Indeed, many of the Colombian and Peruvian women whom I got to know better did not express discomfort when referring to children born outside marriage as they talked about past or present sexual experiences with partners or boyfriends. Nonetheless, these migrants were haunted by the idea of engaging in promiscuous sexual relations or, in their words, "*acostarse con uno y con otro*" (sleeping around), a practice that in Latin American societies is considered improper for women (but not necessarily for men). The emotional distress migrants felt in relation to these "promiscuous sexual practices" was connected to notions of dirtiness, disease, and immorality, and it was due to the fact that they were going against social and religious principles that see sex linked to affection and intimacy and opposed to public material transactions.

Thus, for migrants that felt close to the Catholic faith, sexual practices in the sex sector were defined as shameful and improper. "The first time I went to work [in a brothel] was during *semana santa* (Holy Week). What a shame! Who works during *semana santa* and worst of all in this [type of activity]!," said Carolina, partly mortified and partly laughing about her own audacity.

Within this conceptualization of commercial sexual activities, women involved in more ambiguous encounters, such as eroticized services in barras-bar, became indignant when their work was confused with prostitution and associated with practices that reflect a loose female sexual morality. Lina, a 19 year-old Peruvian migrant working in a barra-bar of Machala, suggested that men differentiate and assess women in relation to their sexual behavior: they distinguish between sexually modest *chicas de su casa* (home-bound girls) and *mujeres regaladas* (women that give themselves away). Being involved in a barra-bar was distressful for this migrant because, even if she defined herself as a waitress and not as a prostitute, she perceived that in the eyes of society she was sexually available; for this reason she felt degraded and rejected. Lina expressed her discomfort in this way:

> In a barra-bar I will never be treated the way I want, respected and valued. I know that men think that girls working in these places are *regaladas* and therefore they do not respect them. In contrast, I hear them talking about *chicas de su casa*, those are the types of women men respect.

Although normative constructions of female sexuality influence Peruvian and Colombian migrants' own accounts about their involvement in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar, for most of these women being away from their home communities eases the emotional distress produced by their engagement in activities that contravene the moral orders of Latin American societies. "Here nobody knows me," said Amalia (38), a Peruvian woman working in a barra-bar of Huaquillas. "If I were working in this over there [in Sullana, her hometown in northern Peru], everybody would be talking." In this sense, geographic distance softens social control and allows women to experience intimacy and sexuality more openly and even transgressively.

Socio-economic position also plays an important role in women's definitions and redefinitions of the meanings of sexual and erotic labor. As I will

illustrate in the following sub-section, multiple and enduring experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and economic scarcity can serve to redefine understandings of sexual commerce. The stories of my informants show that although commercial sexual activities are perceived as immoral or improper, they are also seen as a means to overcome economic difficulties and to open up opportunities that otherwise are closed for them and their families.

Making choices, making sense of sexual and erotic labor

After a failed trip to Spain, Piedad found herself flat broke and with few people to rely on. She had traveled to Ecuador some days before in order to take a flight to Barcelona, find a well-paid job, and escape the economic difficulties she had faced in her native Chanchamayo (in the Peruvian Amazonia) and later in the Peruvian capital, Lima, where she had had a small and informal business that left irregular earnings. But Piedad was denied entry into Spain and, consequently, her family's savings and the borrowed money she invested in the trip were all gone. Unwilling to go back home defeated, she decided to stay in Machala and look for a job that would enable her to pay her debts, save some money, and rebuild her life.

Piedad arrived in Machala in 2005, leaving her husband and two daughters in Lima. "I got involved in this because I lost everything …. There are other jobs but they don't give enough to live on," she said, justifying her involvement in the sex trade. Piedad also emphasized that her engagement in brothels and nightclubs was a temporary way of getting out of economic hardship. When I asked this migrant to evaluate her experience in the sex sector, she gave me different opinions. In one of our first meetings she said: "*Lo único bueno es la plata; lo malo, acostarse con uno y con otro porque la gente piensa que eres lo peor del mundo" (*The only good thing is the money; the bad thing, sleeping around because people think you're the worst thing in the world). During the encounters that followed, Piedad mentioned other aspects that revealed the contradictions women engaged in commercial sexual activities confront. "Thank god, I'm working, and

I'm sending money to support my family," she affirmed. As other women I interviewed, Piedad saw her engagement in the sex trade as a means of accessing labor and building the economic capital that would allow her to "*sacar adelante a la familia*" (move her family ahead). Simultaneously, this migrant complained about offensive clients and the lies she had to tell her family in order to conceal her involvement in the sex trade.

As impoverished women and unskilled workers, all my informants faced multiple experiences of marginalization in their origin countries. Once in Ecuador, they found that labor and economic opportunities were equally limited, especially for those with an irregular migration status. In the restrictive migration and labor context of Ecuador, however, sexualized labor activities are open for exoticized foreign women (chapter 3). Moreover, these activities are perceived as alternatives to other available jobs, such as care service and domestic work. When some of my informants used terms like *explotación* (exploitation) and *esclavitud* (slavery), they were not using them to define experiences in the sex industry as governmental and non-governmental actors do when conflating sex work with sex trafficking; they used these concepts to refer to the precarious working conditions and hierarchical employer-worker relations in other low-status jobs, especially in the domestic work sector, where some of the migrant women I interviewed had been engaged in for years.

In Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia, as well as in other Latin American countries, domestic work represents the most important occupation for women in terms of the number of women employed in this sector and, at the same time, the one with the worst working conditions (Valenzuela and Mora 2009). This income-generating activity is scarcely regulated, and this leaves domestic workers unprotected, either because their work falls outside national legal regimes or because their rights, recently included in some local laws, are not respected by employers. Consequently, domestic workers, especially "live-in" workers, face long-working hours, confinement, mistreatment, and salaries that are frequently

below the minimum wage. This was precisely what many of my informants wanted to change about their situation when they decided to migrate.

Thus, even if domestic work offers unskilled migrants in Ecuador an opportunity to legalize their migration status (chapter 4), women with higher educational attainment and no previous experience in the domestic sector, such as Lina (secondary education and middle-class background), did not consider it a viable alternative. Domestic work is not only poorly paid but also racially and class stigmatized. Therefore, Lina preferred to work in barras-bar, where demand for young female workers is constant and sex is not necessarily part of the offered services. Similarly, women with years of experience in domestic service dismissed the possibility of going back to this kind of labor. Instead, they highlighted the advantages they found in brothels and nightclubs, where, despite stigmatization and lack of legal protection, earnings are perceived as lucrative and working hours as more flexible. The words of Paula illustrate this point.

Paula, a forty-year-old Colombian woman, worked in domestic service and in other low-status jobs since she was fifteen and decided to abandon her family home because of conflictive relations with her mother and sister. She first worked in Colombia and then in Ecuador, moving back and forth until she decided to stay permanently. This migrant defined her earnings in the sex trade as "*plata mal habida*" (wrongfully earned or dirty money) and, as other Colombians and Peruvians I interviewed, she frequently talked about "abuses" from clients, owners, and different control authorities. Yet, Paula also stressed the comparative advantages of commercial sexual activities. One of the ways she did so was recounting her first experience in the sex trade, at the age of twenty six, when she was a single mother trying to escape from repeated stories of labor exploitation, sexual harassment, and salaries that served only to survive:

> Believe me, I didn't know that this thing existed until I read an advertisement that was looking for women to work in a massage parlour; this was in Quito …. The manager of the business told me that I had to be in underwear or dressed very sexy to assist clients. That was like a cold shower for me because I didn't know that the

> job was like that …. But I decided to stay because earnings were far higher and the working schedule allowed me to live with and take care of my child, something that was not always possible as a live-in domestic worker because some employers don't hire you with children. … I had no idea that this existed! If I had known this before, I wouldn't have gone through all the penuries I had to go through.

The arguments of Piedad, Paula, and other Peruvian and Colombian migrants in Ecuador resonate with those of Colombian women in Italy and Spain portrayed by Teodora Hurtado (2008). These women, poor and black, felt economically and socially excluded and with virtually no options to change their future lives and those of their families in their origin country. In this context, the movement of these women into the European sex trade created a series of paradoxes. Although these migrants experienced new exclusions in destination countries, sex work opened up economic opportunities for themselves and their families and, as a consequence, they gained admiration and respect in their impoverished home communities.

Thus, Hurtado argues that a context marked by high levels of poverty and exclusion serves as a frame to recreate the meanings of prostitution. The experiences of her informants illustrate the ways in which transnational migrations shape understandings of prostitution and link it to ideas about economic betterment and upward social mobility. This is because their engagement in the European sex trade offers poor black women the possibility of establishing long-term relationships with clients and, potentially, reach a higher social status: that of white men's wives. The author also refers to the "dual morality of prostitution": an activity that is generally viewed as reprehensible, but that in particular contexts is also perceived as a means to escape poverty.

As with Hurtado's informants, the Colombian and Peruvian migrants I interviewed did not see activities in the sex sector only as means to overcome economic urgencies. Their engagement in brothels and nightclubs in El Oro and other Ecuadorian cities, where earnings are paid in U.S. dollars and significantly higher than in other low-status jobs, gave them the financial means to strategically

accomplish their migration plans, such as saving money to build a house, opening a business that would allow them to work independently, offering education to their children, and accessing consumer goods in order to live more comfortably. Yet, when these migrants explained their engagement in the sex sector, they emphasized their position as marginalized women, and they repeatedly asserted that their involvement in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar was "*por necesidad y no por gusto*" (due to economic need and not for their own pleasure). In this way, they distanced themselves from the negative stereotypes attributed to women in this sector, especially the image of the stereotypical "fallen woman" that enjoys her work and satisfies her lust and desires.

Hence, contrary to popular discourse and some academic work that equate experiences in the sex industry with homogeneous forms of oppression and exploitation, my informants' narratives expose the paradoxes and contradictions encountered by women in the sex sector. In this section I have shown that partaking in commercial sexual activities and erotic services gives migrant women the opportunity to change their life chances, while simultaneously confronting them with the emotional distress caused by engaging in highly stigmatized labor. To put it differently: some migrant women manage to live a better and more "decent life"—in the sense of earning more money and having access to comfort and consumption—through an "indecent" type of work.

The lived experiences of these women also complicate binary definitions of commercial sex as either forced or voluntary because these migrants made some choices and took some risks, but they did it in a context characterized by restrictions and limited opportunities. In the words of Chapkis (1997): women make a "rational choice" when they enter the sex industry, although they do not necessarily make a "free choice," which is available to very few individuals in societies hierarchically structured by class, sex, ethnicity, and national origin.

Searching for legitimacy

As several studies have explained, women in the sex industry deploy a series of practical and discursive strategies in order to prevent stigmatizing activities from affecting their individual identities and to secure a sense of self (e.g. Phoenix 2001; Brewis and Linstead 2000). A widespread strategy consists in maintaining the boundaries between private and public worlds, which are seen as dangerously mixed-up in commercial sexual activities and intimate-material relations. To do so, women in the sex sector tend to use working names instead of real names, and they deny access to certain body parts that they associate to private intimate encounters with partners and lovers. Many of my informants used these types of strategies. Some of them also avoided nightclubs that required women to entertain men with intimate conversation, and they rejected clients that they knew as trespassers of intimate body territories. Other migrants made a big effort to separate their private life from their working life. Piedad, for example, made clear that she was one person while she was inside the brothel and a different one once outside:

> I come here [to the brothel] and I am what I am. I can be a whore, as people say. But leaving this place, in my house or in the park, I am a *señora* [married woman, or Mrs., with emphasis]; I am *la señora de*… [Mrs., or the wife of…]

But not every woman in the sex industry draws clear boundaries between commercial and non-commercial sexual encounters. On the contrary, some of them blur and confuse the lines between sex, money, and affection as a way of distancing themselves from stereotyped notions of sexual commerce as purely sexual and dehumanizing. Defining men with whom they establish intimate relationships as *amigos* (friends) and calling their material retributions *regalos* (gifts) or *ayudas* (economic support) create uncertain relations that allow women to negotiate identities and meanings (Cabezas 2009). These ambiguous relationships, where commodified sex and intimate emotions are not necessarily mutually

exclusive, complicate simple understandings of sexual commerce. I will explore this topic further in the next chapter, where I concentrate on the blurring of boundaries between sex, money, and affection both in the sex industry and in daily life relationships.

In what follows, I will explain three ways in which Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the sex trade construct positive images of themselves in order to preserve their dignity and self-worth, which they feel are at risk due to their involvement in socially stigmatized labor activities. Through these discursive strategies, my informants trace distinctions between them and other women engaged in the sex industry, and in so doing, they present themselves as different, special, and more respectable.

Characterizing commercial sex as educational and therapeutic

Some of my informants highlighted the positive elements they saw in their work and the important role that women in the sex trade play in society. The positive elements they mentioned were connected to the potentially educational and therapeutic nature of commercial sex, as informants in other studies have also emphasized (see for example Brewis and Linstead 2000). Carolina described the contributions that she offered to young clients through her work in the following terms:

> I advise youngsters [that come to the brothel]; I tell them to protect themselves and use a condom because some of them are really ignorant, they have not received any information at home. And there are clients that tell me that I'm like a psychologist because they come and talk about their problems with their wives. They say: my wife this, my wife that. So I tell them: that's because you don't do nice things to her. … They say that their wives don't like oral sex, and I tell them: do this, do that. This is because Ecuadorian women are more restrained in relation to sex, and Colombians are more open to talking about these things …. I like talking to clients.

Carolina distinguished between Ecuadorian and Colombian women, suggesting that the latter are more inclined to openly talk about sex to men and hence inform and advise clients about sexual life and sexual practices. Similarly, Paula traced distinctions between young women in the sex trade and more mature women like herself, whom she considered more apt to support clients with personal problems. These mature women are like psychologists and thus they play an important role, claimed Paula, while complaining that this role has been invisibilized due to the social marginalization of women in the sex trade:

> A lot of people marginalize us, they define us in the worst terms, and they don't realize the role we have in our work. Although young women [in the sex trade] just do what they have to do and that's it, mature women are sought after to talk. Clients come to see us to talk about problems they cannot tell anybody. They want to make a friend, talk to you, share a drink with you. And if they don't find you one day, they will come back another day. … We have to be like psychologists and nobody sees that.

Carolina and Paula made it clear that through their work they were able to contribute to the clients' well-being as well as to the betterment of society at large. This, in turn, put them in a position that gave them the right to demand respect. Therefore, migrants in brothels and nightclubs rejected labels like "whore" and "prostitute" because they perceived them as derogative or offensive, as will I explain later on.

Decorum, modesty, and good manners in the sex industry

Another way women portrayed their work in a positive light is their characterization of activities in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar as modest, decorous, and good-mannered. By stressing that they are involved in these and not in other sorts of activities—more directly sexual, "vulgar," or "scandalous"—my informants tried to present themselves as respectable and resembling "normal workers." Peruvian women in barras-bar claimed that they engage in businesses

that are quite different from brothels and nightclubs. Although some of them recognized that working in barras-bar requires certain degrees of intimacy, such as dancing and chatting with clients and sometimes also exchanging "little" and "friendly kisses" with them, they also maintained that these businesses offer "*diversión sana*" (healthy fun) because they do not include sex-for-money exchanges. This is how one of my informants, Cristina, described her work:

> People think that because this is a place of entertainment, girls working here are flirtatious; some girls might be like that but others are not …. In a barra-bar a girl serves, she dances with a man that comes to have a good time, but as *diversión sana*, and [she's] not [with him] because he offers money to go out and have sex. This is the way I will explain the work I do.

Migrants involved in brothels and nightclubs also characterized some activities positively, desexualizing and even moralizing them. Some mentioned that they try to avoid "scandalous clothes" (such as bikinis) in their working places. Others went further and they assured me that they were mostly involved in leisure, such as offering dance shows or drinking and conversing with clients, and not in directly sexual activities. "I practically don't sleep with men," claimed Katty, trying to distance herself from the most direct and stigmatized activity in the sex industry. This migrant also explained that the dance shows she performed were not "vulgar" or "*morbosas*" (raunchy) but "artistic." In this way, she presented herself as a modest woman and as a performer that entertain the public. This is how Katty described the dance shows she performed in exclusive clubs in Panama and later Ecuador:

> I learned [to dance] in Panama; I had an instructor who taught us. I found it very nice because he taught us to dance with art, not like… vulgar. I have seen some shows and they are quite *morbosos* [raunchy], I don't do that. I was taught to do it artistically, as an art, not like *morbosidad*. Because there are two types [of dance shows]: those with *morbosidad* and those with art, so we learned to do it with art. And clients said that they like it, they said that they enjoyed my dance shows and they asked the owner [of the business] to pick me [to dance].

Providing services to "gente de clase" (people with class)

Different scholars have explained that class position serves as an important mediating factor in constructing and resisting sexualized subjectivities.[1] Wendy Chapkis (1997), for instance, argues that women's accounts of their experience in the sex industry vary dramatically, and "the source of those differences may lie less in the 'nature' of erotic labor than in the social location of the worker performing it and the conditions under which the work takes place" (p. 98). The author refers principally to class and status position differences; such differences not only divide women in the sex trade but also create significantly dissimilar experiences, as well as diverse feelings and perceptions in relation to their involvement in commercial sexual activities. Her ethnographic study and interviews with women in erotic labor in the U.S and The Netherlands illustrate that young white women with higher educational attainment engage in higher status businesses where they benefit not only from higher earnings and money savings but also from creating more distance from the negative stereotypes linked to women in the sex trade. These negative stereotypes are often condensed in the image of the "cheap whore."

The experiences and self-perceptions of my informants in relation to their work were also guided by class and social status. But in contrast to what most of the literature on this topic indicates, Colombians' and Peruvians' narratives and self-perceptions were not connected to an objective socio-economic position but rather to a subjective one. Indeed, the Colombian and Peruvian migrants I interviewed were all low-income workers, with low or medium educational attainment, and most of them had an irregular migration status. Their references to class and social status where essentially linked to the type of clientele they worked with. Thus, some of these women said that working in "*chongos*" (cheap and popular brothels) attended by uneducated men is quite different from offering services in exclusive nightclubs with upper-class and well-off clients. Relations

with the latter group of men made my informants feel better positioned than other women in the sex trade and gave them a sense of a higher class status.

Some of these Colombian and Peruvian migrants recounted their involvement in exclusive nightclubs and their relationships with well-off clients with a sort of pride. They did so despite the fact that most of them were not involved in these types of businesses anymore, due to migration restrictions, their age, or the economic crisis that forced nightclub owners' in El Oro to lower rates and make their businesses more accessible to all types of clients. Katty, for example, remembered her "good years" in an exclusive club of Machala, in 2001 and 2002. She remembered positively that she had offered services to "*gente de clase*" (people with class) and "*gente preparada*" (educated people). As the following excerpt illustrates, Katty talks about her involvement with these types of clients as an indication of her own "style" and good manners:

> Over there, [you found] only *gente de clase* and no… how can I say, *gente baja* [low-class people]. All of them [were] well educated, professional people, like engineers, doctors, business owners, those kind of people, *gente aniñada* [toffs], as we say. The *gente batracia* [slobs] could not get in, only *gente preparada* did …. That place was very expensive …. And they liked to work mainly with Colombian women because they said that Colombians had a certain style to the way they treat people, and as the nightclub was very classy, they preferred to hire Colombian women in order to be patient with clients.

Likewise, Paula recounted that in her mid-twenties she engaged in selective businesses in Quito where clients were elegant and wealthy. She appreciated her involvement with this type of clientele as it allowed her to have lucrative earnings and better working conditions. Moreover, serving "*gente de alta sociedad*" (high-society people) made Paula feel and construct an image of herself as an exclusive and select worker. In this way, this and other migrants recounting similar stories de-stigmatize their work:

> I worked in a nightclub where only men with an invitation were allowed because the owner was the manager of a very important bank in Quito. He was a person with a lot of money, so only people in suits and with an invitation came in. The

> cost of a trick was quite high so I was doing really great in that nightclub …. That business was one of the best [in Quito]. I started to make [dance] shows because some men of a big company asked me to. … In that business you couldn't say that a client misbehaved, no, clients were all familiar people, *gente de alta sociedad*, bankers. … Some of these men proposed to me that I dance in another nightclub, and they offered a higher payment, plus a percentage for [clients] consumption, dinner, the money I made for tricks, and a taxi from and to my house. I accepted to go [with them], although I had a good relationship with the owner of the business; I was a trusted employee for him. But payment was higher in the second business. … that place was also very good, it had a good clientele and carefully chosen girls.

The excerpts above reflect the perceptions of two Colombian women whose educational attainment, ethnic backgrounds, and physical appearance (light-skinned *mestizas*) allowed them to enter exclusive sex businesses. In contrast, two of my three Afro-descendant informants stressed the limited opportunities they found in a "racist country" where they attracted few clients or were excluded from businesses that want to maintain an image of exclusiveness through the class and ethnic backgrounds of their clients and workers. For them, their experience in the Ecuadorian sex trade was defined in rather negative terms. I make this point to highlight that migrants' experiences in the sex industry depend on and vary according to multiple factors.

Likewise, participants' meanings in relation to the commercial sexual activities and erotic services they engage in are far from homogeneous or self-evident; rather, they are contextually influenced, they change, and they often involve conflicting feelings as I have attempted to show above. For this reason, the labels that are commonly used to define women in the sex trade, such as whore, sex slave, or sex worker, are called into question by the discourses and daily life practices of these women.

Neither whores, nor slaves

When I asked Colombian and Peruvian migrants to name and define the activities they perform in brothels and nightclubs, many expressed confusion. Some referred

to their engagement in the sex trade through indirect and ambiguous terms, such as "this life" or simply "work." All of them, however, agreed to reject the label of "whore" due to its derogative connotation, and many preferred not to identify as "prostitutes" because they also considered this term offensive. This is how Carolina defined herself and her activities in brothels and nightclubs:

> I'm not a whore. That sounds awful, like trash. This is like… is like a service. I offer a service to clients that know what they are coming to. Each one of us gets its good turn so we both deserve respect …. Whore is horrible! Nobody deserves that [label].

The Colombian and Peruvian migrants I interviewed did not see themselves as "sex slaves" either. This concept has been increasingly used by different social actors in Ecuador to define the situation of deceit, coercion, and sexual violence that *all* migrant women in brothels, nightclubs, and barras-bar confront. In contrast, my informants' narratives not only referred to heterogeneous, complex, and paradoxical experiences, as I have explained in this and previous chapters, but they also stressed the courage and nerve necessary to embark on a migration journey and work in the sex industry. "*Me arriesgué"* (I took the risk), said Katty to explain her decision to engage in an activity that is often dangerous and to portray herself as a courageous woman. In a similar way, other migrants characterized themselves as "fearless," "determined," "audacious," attributes they considered necessary to work in the sex industry. "You need a lot of courage to do this and girls that are too passive, they just can't do it," claimed Marcia.

Colombian and Peruvian migrants did not ignore the existence of forced prostitution and trafficking cases in the sex industry. Many referred to adult women and principally underage girls involved with and exploited by "*chulos*" (pimps) and pressured by their husbands and partners to engage in brothels and nightclubs. Some also talked about "dangerous gangs" that threaten women and profit from their work. But contrary to homogenizing views about commercial sex and

eroticized services, my informants also recognized more autonomous and nuanced experiences.

The changing views and feelings these migrant women had in relation to their engagement in the Ecuadorian sex industry was something that caught my attention. Some of these migrants defined their involvement in brothels and nightclubs as "a work as any other" when they were "making good money," moving without restrictions, and working in relatively good conditions. But after confronting abuses, such as detentions resulting from restrictive migration regulations, bribes exacted by corrupt officials, and humiliations from clients and partners, these migrants defined their involvement in the sex trade as *el peor trabajo del mundo* (the worst job in the world).

The negative images my informants reproduced about commercial sexual activities and the abuses they had to confront in the sex industry made many of them reject the idea of becoming steady workers or "professionals" in this industry. For this and other reasons that I will explain in the last section of this chapter, most Colombian and Peruvian migrants in El Oro did not identify as "sex workers." In this province, the term "sex work" has a long history that is linked to the political struggles of working-class women who fought and still fight against violence in the sex trade. These organized women claim that commercial sexual activities should be recognized as an autonomous form of work that, as any other work, requires protection, safety, and rights. But my informants' open or subtle rejection of this term, despite considering their engagement in the sex industry as a form of labor or an income-generating activity, made me rethink the notion of "sex work."

Sex work/er: the power and limits of a "global" political concept

The concept of "sex work" emerged in the 1970s through organized movements in Europe and the United States in order to replace the terms "prostitution" and "prostitutes," which emphasize the moral status and identity (a social or

psychological characteristic) of certain groups of women, and focus on the labor issues inherent in the notion of "sex work." This reconceptualization served to distance women from the social stigma attached to those engaged in commercial sex. Additionally, sex work broadened the concept of prostitution, as it refers to different types of erotic or sex related work, such as strippers, escort services, erotic dancing, and telephone sex, and not only to direct sex-for-money activities.

The concept sex work is inextricably connected to the language of human rights and to struggles for the recognition of better working conditions for women; therefore, it has the potential to further the appeals for social justice for people in the sex industry (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Cabezas 2005 cited in Cabezas 2009). Another important element implied in the concept of sex work and in the sex workers' rights movement is the fact that women (but also men and transgender people) involved in commercial sexual activities are legitimized as spokespersons or self-determining agents instead of being only "spoken for" by academics, social workers, anti-prostitution feminists, the media, politicians, and so on (McClintock 1993).

In the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, the sex workers' rights movement gained prominence and the concept of sex work was gradually introduced throughout the world, even in documents of some governmental and intergovernmental institutions (such as the Global AIDS Program), in order to improve the situation of people in the sex trade. Consequently, there has been some degree of agreement in relation to this term in some international agencies as well as in certain feminist and academic circles. Furthermore, some activists consider the "sex work(er)" concept as a "global concept" that guides the political struggles of a movement present both in the north and the south. In Ecuador, for example, the Association of Autonomous Women Workers "June 22nd," set up in Machala in 1982 as the country's first sex workers organization, is considered as part of the "global sex workers' movement" (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998).

Nonetheless, the widespread agreement regarding the concept of "sex work" and its adoption by sex workers' organizations in different parts of the world

does not mean that this "global concept" has been left unquestioned. Recently, the term "sex work" has been scrutinized by some academics, just like the term "prostitution" in earlier years. Holly Wardlow (2004) and Amalia Cabezas (2009) are two of the academics problematizing this concept. Although these scholars recognize the value of the notion of sex work to move debates from moral to economic terms and from criminalizing to human rights approaches, they also warn about the "globalization" of this concept because it can potentially exclude other meanings that the exchange of sex for money has in different cultural contexts and in relation to different subject positions (see also Ruiz and Nencel 2011).

The work of Cabezas was particularly useful for my analysis. Her critiques of the notion of "sex work" refer to the flexible and contingent practices that this term erases and the fixed identity the sex worker discourse constructs. Focusing on heterosexual relationships in the Caribbean, this author explains that, in global capitalism, different forms of commercial sexual exchanges take place both in organized but especially in non-organized sections of the sex industry. In these informal spaces, such as bars or tourist resorts, more space is opened for liminal and uncertain relations that combine sex, friendship, romance, leisure, and different forms of material gain. Women make use of these types of relations in order to survive economic privations and even to cultivate long-term ties that can potentially offer a better future.

Thus, Cabezas questions the concept of "sex work" (and "sex tourism") as an analytical tool for understanding these manifold, flexible, and uncertain relationships. For her, using "saturated categories of analysis" not only homogenizes and simplifies the complex negotiations women make in the globalized economy. Using the category of "sex worker" also fixes the identity of the women involved in these different practices into a collective character that clamors and organizes for rights. According to this scholar, although this clamor empowers an important group of women, it also "proves futile" in "situations

where sexual commerce is [occasional], unclear or where full commodification does not take place" (Cabezas 2009: p. 21).

The critical reflections of Cabezas and other authors in relation to the term "sex work(er)" help us understand how this "global concept" has been appropriated, translated, and reinterpreted in the local context of the Ecuadorian province of El Oro. As I show below, the multiple subject positions of women involved in intimate-material relations and the adequacy of the term "sex work" to describe diverse and complex relationships have determined that some women adopt this term with all its political implications, while others, migrants among them, do not identify with and even reject it.

Local meanings and multiple subject positions

In the early 1990s organized women working in brothels and nightclubs of El Oro were still struggling to find a better term to call themselves when they appeared in public and negotiated rights with local authorities. Until then and to avoid stigmatization, these women had called themselves *señoras* (literally meaning married woman, or Mrs., but used as women/ladies) or simply *trabajadoras* (workers), trying to avoid calling attention to the sexual nature of their activity. However, during the preparation of a national encounter that authorities and journalists were supposed to attend, local leaders were pressured to make the nature of their work more explicit. It was then that the concept of "sex work" nestled in El Oro. Leaders of the "June 22nd" Association explain that the adoption of the term "sex work(er)" was part of their process of self-organization and political struggle, but they also acknowledge that adopting this political term was not easy because not every woman in the organization approved of it. Karina Bravo, a former leader of the Association, explained this as follows:

> Some women in the organization did not want to refer to their work in a direct way. They could not see this activity as normal work … they were influenced by the social stigma …. Adopting this term [sex worker] was a fight not only against

> local society but also amongst ourselves. It took some time before we fully incorporated the concept in daily living, when we realized, through group discussions and workshops, that there is a distinction between what we "do" and what we "are."[2]

Karina's expressions suggest that sexual practices do not necessarily translate into sexual identities and thus they cannot be fixed in the concept of "sex worker." They also suggest that the construction of a collective labor identity as a strategy for political organization does not obliterate personal identifications.

But despite the power that many organized women in the El Oro sex trade find in the concept of "sex work/er," most of the migrant women I interviewed resisted it because they perceived that this term fixed a temporary income-generating activity into a permanent sort of profession. The words of one of my informants, Sherly, a Colombian who got involved in brothels in Machala and other Ecuadorian provinces after being excluded from the Chilean border, indicate that many migrants felt that identifying as sex workers would transform what they considered to be a temporary activity into a permanent one. This and other women I interviewed were convinced that both their stay in Ecuador and their involvement in the sex industry were temporary and even casual. Therefore, Sherly referred to her engagement in the sex trade in ambiguous terms, and she struggled to recognize the activities she performed in sex businesses as "her" work:

> I would not know how to define this... Work, maybe, hmmm… But it's not *my* work [her emphasis], it's not something fixed. I never thought of doing something like this. It's just something that happens to some people; things that happen in life.

The resistance Peruvian and Colombian migrants working in brothels and nightclubs in El Oro expressed in relation to the concept of "sex work/er" can in part be explained by the lack of contact these migrants had with sex workers organizations, both in Ecuador as well as in their origin countries. Among the 35 women I had in-depth interviews with, I only found two who had a connection to

El Oro's sex worker organization and hence defined themselves as sex workers. These two women were Colombians who had arrived to Ecuador in an earlier process of migration. The rest had crossed the border after the year 2000, and some were temporary or circular migrants that moved back and forth. Thus, even if these migrants complained about the restrictions and abuses they faced in the sex sector and all of them demanded respect, they were not willing to organize because they did not want to become visible and draw attention to their irregular migration status. Some of them were convinced that as foreign women and irregular migrants they did not have the right to demand rights.

Resisting the term "sex work" and the label of "sex workers" was also a result of the negative connotations attached to commercial sex and the negative experiences many Colombian and Peruvian women faced in the Ecuadorian sex sector; for instance: abuses from business owners, mistreatment from clients, and exclusionary practices from migration officers. These negative experiences made it difficult to connect commercial sexual activities with the positive side of the concept "sex work/er," an autonomous form of labor that should be protected by basic rights.

Women involved in informal and ambiguous commercial sexual activities did not see themselves as "sex workers" either. This was the case of Peruvian women working in barras-bar, an activity that involves body energies, eroticism, and certain intimacy but not necessarily paid sexual relations. For these migrants, who defined themselves as "waitresses," the term sex worker was synonymous with prostitute. This shows that the original objective of the term, to be inclusive for all individuals working in the sex industry, has not been accepted by everyone working in this sector.

In chapter 2, I explained that changes in the economy and cultural life of El Oro, as well as technological innovations, have transformed and diversified commercial sexual practices of the province. As a result, there are new and more informal spaces for commercial sex, and there are different persons, and not only organized sex workers, that turn to commercial sexual exchanges as a means to

alleviate economic needs or access consumption goods. Some of the women involved in these occasional sexual services—students, models, and middle-class professionals—use the internet to attract clients, and they define themselves as *damas de compañía* (escorts) or *chicas pre-pago* (call girls). Although in El Oro these terms reveal the sexual nature of the activities, they do not identify women as "sex workers," an identity that is usually associated with low-income organized workers.

But there are also migrant (and local) women involved in uncertain relations that combine sex, friendship, companionship, romance, and material gain. These women preferred to avoid labels altogether. For them, what they do is occasional (just like their migration experience), and part of a broader network of interpersonal and daily life relationships that could be reduced neither to sex nor to work.

In sum, the acceptance of the terms sex work and sex workers is determined by actors' willingness to organize and engage in a political struggle, and the adequacy of these terms to describe the multiple activities that combine sex and money. Although the concept "sex work" is theoretically used to broaden the term prostitution and include the myriad of spaces and expressions that are part of the sex industry, in practice many women consider the term to be synonymous with prostitution and more precisely with a stigmatized sort of "profession." For all these reasons, many migrants reject the term and do not identify with it. Hence, a tension exists between the global definition and the local interpretations.

Concluding remarks

As stated in the excerpt that opens this chapter, the exchange of goods and money for sexual and eroticized services is not an unambiguous endeavor but a discursive construction that is contested and in motion. In other words, there is no unique or universal meaning of sex or sexuality; rather, different meanings are constructed in

particular places, material contexts, and historical junctures. Moreover, meanings of sexuality are not only constructed from the top down but also from within, by the same participants engaged in sexual and erotic activities.

In this chapter, I have explained that Colombian and Peruvian migrants' perceptions and the meanings of their involvement in the Ecuadorian sex industry are guided by their socioeconomic and migration conditions, as well as by their particular understandings of sex and sexuality. This means that these migrants reproduce discourses about commercial sex shaped by Catholic ideas and traditional sexual and gender moralities, where the notion of "indecency" is salient. Simultaneously, these women recreate the meanings of commercial sex in a migration context marked by geographic distance, anonymity, labor opportunities for "exotic foreign women," and the restrictions they face as "illegal migrants" and unskilled workers. Therefore, my informants expressed conflicting meanings and feelings about their work.

They expressed, for example, that working in brothels and nightclubs where earnings are higher than in other low-status jobs allows them to accomplish their migration projects (save some money, build a house, educate their children, etc.) and move their families ahead. At the same time, they complained about the negative imagery and ideas imposed on them due to their engagement in a highly stigmatized activity. To confront these negative mental images, migrants in the sex trade adopt a series of discursive strategies that aim to construct positive images of their selves and thus preserve dignity and self-worth.

Drawing on my informants' subjective experiences and meanings, I have called into question labels like "sex slave" and "sex worker." My critical analysis of the term sex worker is not intended to negate the importance of political movements that organize around this concept in order to further the appeals for social justice for people involved in the sex industry. My intent has been to call attention to the limits of the "global concept" of sex work(er) when defining the multiple, sporadic, and ambiguous intimate-material relations women in capitalist economies engage in.

Hence, following Amalia Cabezas (2004), I state that researchers' analyses need to have some connection to the way people understand themselves and make sense of their lives. This author warns academics about the imposition of generalizing categories on different people's sexual experiences, and she urgently calls for more complicated approaches that enhance our understanding of the erotics and that place human rights and citizenship at the core of analyses of commercial sex and intimate-material relations. I will come back to this in my Conclusion.

CHAPTER 6

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES: COMMODIFYING INTIMACY, ROMANTICIZING COMMERCIAL SEX

> …the mingling of economic transactions and intimate relations regularly perplexes participants and observers, and it does not perplex them because it happens rarely. On the contrary, people are constantly mixing their intimate relations with economic transactions. That mixing perplexes observers because of a common belief that economic rationality and intimate ties contradict each other.
>
> —Vivian Zelizer (2005: 11)

On a sunny morning of September 2007, I visited Nancy (22) and Karina (28), two Peruvian migrants I had met some months before in a barra-bar of Machala. These women shared a room in the courtyard of an ample but humble house, near the city center. Despite the austerity of the room (concrete floor, windows with bars but without panes, and only one bed that they shared), Nancy and Karina's place was equipped with several electronic devices: a new television, a radio recorder, a blender, and three mobile phones. While I looked around the room, Nancy told me: "all these things are gifts from friends whom we met in the *barras*, including the mobile phones." Noticing my surprise, Nancy and Karina explained that although working in barras-bar was far from an ideal experience (they mentioned labor exploitation and a "nasty environment"), they had made good friends in the different establishments they had been employed in. Karina, an irregular migrant just like Nancy, recounted that one of those *amigos* (friends) visited her in jail and brought her daily meals during the three days she was detained by the migration police. Nancy talked about her *novio* (boyfriend), an Ecuadorian man that she met in a barra-bar. "He wants to marry me", she recalled. "He gives me money when I

need it and he wants to rent an apartment for me so my family can come and visit me in a comfortable place".

Notions of friendship and romance are usually considered not only irrelevant but also truly opposite to the dynamics of the sex industry. In fact, the intersection between sexuality and commerce is often depicted as an expression of men's prerogatives and dominance over women, while formal and informal places offering sexual and eroticized services are characterized as sources of insecurity and sites for the sexual exploitation of women. Therefore, friendliness, solidarity, care, and romance are unthinkable notions in these places, according to hegemonic discourses about migrant women in the sex trade.

Furthermore, commercial sexual activities and relations between sex workers and their clients are seen as the flip side of "loving sex" and "loving couples." As an article published in an Ecuadorian journal states:

> What is sought in an encounter between a man and a woman in which there is no other relationship than the one defined by the services offered and the money paid [in exchange]? Probably, this is the aspect that contradicts the sexuality lived within a loving couple and the relationship between the prostitute and the client: the tenderness and reciprocity of pleasure, which are replaced by the agreement of paid services.[1]

Both in popular discourse as well as in some academic work clear lines are traced between commercial and non-commercial sexual encounters, between paid sex and "loving" or "genuine" sex (e.g. Pateman 1983; Barry 1985). In this chapter, I question these supposedly clear lines. I explain how the boundaries between emotionality and commerce, intimacy and materiality are often blurred in the discourses and practices of migrant women and the relationships they establish with Ecuadorian men. My main argument is that low-income Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador access resources, such as cash money and documentation to regularize their migration situation, not only through the commodification of sexuality and eroticism, as discussed in chapter 5, but also through the strategic use of intimacy, friendship, and affect.

A growing and relatively recent body of literature has explored the connections between sex, emotionality, and commerce and between intimacy and materiality more broadly. Scholars have approached this complex topic in different ways and from different disciplines, especially sex work studies. Thus, some authors explain that the display of emotions and "love performances" by women in the sex industry are basically rational strategies for "capitalizing on sexuality" (Sanders 2005) or turning commercial sexual transactions into long-term relationships that can provide greater benefits and potentially a better life (Brennan 2004). Others have defined close relationships between sex workers and their regular clients in terms of "bounded authenticity," that is, an authentic yet limited physical and emotional connection that expresses important changes in economy, culture, and erotic life and a new paradigm of sexual commerce. This new paradigm, a post-industrial paradigm, according to Bernstein (2007a), consists in the frequent and explicit incorporation of emotionality in the economic transaction.

Indeed, Elizabeth Bernstein explains that structural transformations taking place in late capitalism both in public and private life, such as the informalization of labor, the commodification of private-sphere relations, and the high mobility of individuals, have informed contemporary modes of eroticism, including commercial sex. The sexual ethic of these transformations opposes procreative and companionate models of sexuality, and it is connected to a growing service economy "which serves to redirect an ever expanding set of human needs from noncommodified, domestic space to the (newly privatized and domesticated) market sphere" (2007a: 175). The work of Bernstein, however, focuses on the intimate exchanges of middle classes in industrialized nations.

Other authors have paid more attention to intimate-material relations involving impoverished women (and men) from the global south. Going beyond "authentic" and "inauthentic" relationships and situating different forms of commodified sex and eroticized labor within transnational relations of power, the work of Cheng (2007), Faier (2007), and Cabezas (2009) suggests that although desire, romance, and love are frequently performed in sex, tourism, and other

entertainment industries, once sexuality and eroticism are unleashed, there are unpredictable consequences for those involved. These and other ethnographic studies also reveal that encounters in bars, sex clubs, and tourism sites can lead not only to sporadic relationships mixing sex, friendship, and different forms of material gain but also to more stable emotional linkages, including marriage (Piscitelli 2008b).

A smaller group of studies have looked at the shifting boundaries between commodified and non-commodified sex in daily life interactions and beyond the labor contexts of prostitution or sex work. Mark Hunter (2002) examines the links between sex and gifts among heterosexual couples in South Africa. The author defines these links as "transactional sex," and he explains that participants in these intimate relations are constructed as "girlfriends" and "boyfriends" and not as "prostitutes" and "clients." According to Hunter, three factors come together and lead to "transactional sex": (1) gendered material inequalities and more specifically "the privileged position of men, rooted in their access to the most lucrative segments of the formal and informal economy" (p. 101); (2) local constructions of masculinity placing a high value on men having multiple partners; (3) and the agency of women, who approach transactional relations not as passive victims but in order to subsist and access consumption goods, "in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures" (p. 101). This and other similar studies, however, are situated in a HIV/AIDS research framework.[2] Yet their broader contribution is to exemplify, in Hunter's words, the "materiality of everyday sex," or the casual and informal ways in which different groups of people, and not only "professional" sex workers, use intimacy to meet their financial goals, escape marginalization, and move ahead.

My work is inspired by this last group of studies, although I locate my analysis in the framework of migration scholarship. Through this frame, I illustrate how the experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador are informed not only by sexuality, as I have explained in previous chapters, but also by

emotionality and by the interlinkages between these two dimensions. I will show that the strategic combination of sex, eroticism, emotionality, and materiality provides impoverished and irregular migrant women with means to navigate the restrictions and vulnerabilities they are confronted with during their migration experience while pursuing the projects and dreams that motivated them to cross borders.

This chapter is divided in four sections. The first two sections explain the different ways in which care and affection are incorporated into formal and informal spaces of the El Oro sex industry. The third one explores how intimacy and material exchanges overlap in freelance erotic encounters and everyday intimate relations that rest outside the frame of labor. The divisions in these sections are not meant to maintain strict distinctions between intimate-material relations taking place in public spaces of the sex sector and those that take place in private places and everyday life encounters. As I illustrated with the stories of Karina and Nancy, relationships that start in public spaces offering sexual and eroticized services sometimes extend to private sites and evolve into more stable and close relationships. Thus, these divisions are meant to expose the multiple spaces and forms in which intimacy and materiality connect. In the last section, I explore the fears provoked by mixing intimacy and materiality in the context of intra-regional migrations into Ecuador.

Business strategies and emotional ties in nightclubs and brothels

May 2008. The intimate environment of a nightclub of Machala contrasts with the distant, albeit noisy, ambiance I noticed in many daytime brothels. Some sex workers accompanied clients and chatted pleasantly with them. I heard laughter. I saw a couple exchanging hugs. The majority of the women, however, waited at the bar, in groups or alone, and from this place they responded to clients' calls: they approached them, said hello with a kiss on the cheek, as friends do in Ecuador, and they had a short conversation before going to private rooms for sexual encounters.

The economic crisis affecting El Oro in recent years, especially since the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy (January 2000), has also affected the dynamics of the local sex sector. This situation becomes evident in the closure of some businesses and especially in the lowering and freezing of prices in brothels and nightclubs.[3] To sustain the demand for sexual services, business owners have not only offered clients low prices, striptease shows, provocative porno videos, and "free-tricks raffles" in the case of some nightclubs. Some sex business owners have also requested that sex workers be attentive and personal with men in order to hold on to the clientele. Economic incentives are sometimes offered to women that engage in intimate talk with men as a way to increase clients' alcohol consumption and thus increase the business' profits.

Therefore, the insertion of care and intimacy in some working sites is, as several authors have explained, a business strategy used by managers to increase earnings in competitive economic sectors, such as the sex and tourism industries. But the mingling of emotionality and labor is, at the same time, a strategy used by workers for their own purposes (Cabezas 2009). During my fieldwork in El Oro, I noticed that local and migrant women working in brothels and nightclubs made a strategic use of intimacy to make clients demand their services and pay them well. Although the price of a sexual encounter is fixed by business owners, many sex workers—including those in working-class brothels where relationships with clients seem more distant— know that through the strategic use of care and intimacy, they can negotiate better prices with clients, and in this way reduce the number of encounters they engage in or elude sexual practices that many of them dislike (anal sex, for example).

Dayana (Colombian) explained that her "success" with clients and the possibility of receiving higher payments depended precisely on her ability to establish close relationships with these men. "*Yo los mimo mucho, por eso me buscan y regresan*" (I pamper them a lot, that's why they look for me and they come back), she said. According to Dayana, using affectionate words, being

patient with clients, and making them feel "special" are strategies to secure a certain amount of stability with clients and earnings, something that is difficult to achieve in sex work in general, and among migrant women in the sex trade in particular. "There are periods where migration police officers increase their controls [in brothels and nightclubs] and they don't let us [migrants] work," Dayana said. Thus, to face obligations with relatives in origin countries and counteract difficult periods marked by strict controls, detentions, and money spent on bribes to police authorities, my informants used all their charm and different persuasive strategies to *conquistar clientes* (conquer clients). Some migrants, especially Colombians, did so by using *mucha labia* (a lot of persuasive talk). With this they meant that they moved clients by alluding to the urgent needs they have in their origin countries (small children to support all by themselves, for example) and the difficulties they face in Ecuador as foreigners and undocumented migrants in order to receive extra money.

Other Colombian women preferred to exploit the image of *mujeres cariñosas* (loving women) that Ecuadorian men have about this national group. Indeed, my Colombian informants were aware of the exoticized and eroticized images imposed on them and the resulting demand for their services in sexual businesses. They used these stereotyped images for their own benefit and offered the care and intimacy that Ecuadorian clients expected from them.

Although contemporary commercial sexual transactions have, among their new features, an explicit connection with the intimacy that is transacted, as Bernstein (2007) asserts, the insertion of emotions in sexual commerce is not necessarily new. This and other authors give numerous examples of the connection between intimacy and commerce in a wide range of periods and places, and they show that this connection is not restricted to a rational business strategy. In South America, for instance, the study of De Gallo and Alzate (1976) about Colombian brothels in the 1970s refers to the "incomplete commercialization" in the prostitution system of this country, "which allows for the uncommon appearance of affective ties between a prostitute and a client she likes" (p. 2). Similarly, Manzo,

Briones, and Cordero (1991), who present the voices and self-perceptions of organized sex workers in El Oro, suggest that close contact and even familiarity can develop between women offering sexual services and their regular clients. This occurs not only in high- and middle-class businesses, as some scholars suggest (e.g. Hoang 2010) but also between working-class participants. This close contact includes, among other things: mutual sexual gratification, long and intimate conversations, and long-term friendship.

Certainly, in public and clearly identified spaces of the sex industry the relationship between participants is more clearly marked by the elements of a commercial transaction, such as predetermined payment, limited duration of an encounter, and pre-set agreements about permitted and non-permitted sexual behavior. Nonetheless, these relationships can change over time, and affective ties can evolve unexpectedly. In this sense, the mingling of sex, money, friendship, and romance in the sex industry confirms the unstable and fuzzy lines between commodified and non-commodified interactions.

Some of the Colombian and Peruvian migrants engaged in brothels and nightclubs of El Oro talked about friendly and even romantic relationships with clients, as well as with business owners and co-workers. These relationships included feelings and emotions and at the same time strategic moves to solve daily life difficulties in Ecuador. In fact, some of my informants relied on men they had met in their working places, and whom they referred to as friends or boyfriends, to get financial aid to solve urgent needs, obtain information about documentation, get support during detentions and potential deportations, or resolve their irregular situation in Ecuador, sometimes through marriage.

Carolina, for example, established a relationship of convenience with the manager of the first nightclub she worked in. During her first weeks in Ecuador, the manager connected this Colombian migrant to well-off clients that were interested in paying good money for “special services” outside the club. In exchange for these contacts, Carolina gave the manager a small percentage of the

payments she received from her clients. But this relationship that started as something exclusively commercial turned into an intimate and romantic rapport. "I fell in love with him and we began a relationship," Carolina recounted. She also remembered that when her tourist permit was about to expire definitively, after a three-month extension, and with no other possibility to regularize her migration status, the manager/boyfriend proposed to marry her to solve her legal problems. Carolina evoked that episode in this way:

> I asked him: but [we'll get married] for love or only for the papers? And he said: "for love, of course, because I love you very much." He was very nice to me. So we got married in Portoviejo [a city in the central coast of Ecuador].

Hence, rational or convenient relationships often evolve into or combine with intimate and emotional liaisons, and this is rather common among migrant women that find limited opportunities to legally work and reside in destination countries. Sexuality and intimacy more broadly are among the few resources available to them to escape marginalization and further their migration projects.

Offering company and intimacy in the informal spaces of the sex trade

In informal spaces of the sex industry, where the relationships between participants are more ambiguous or less clearly marked by the elements of a commercial transaction, there is more space to cross the boundaries between intimacy and commerce. This is especially clear in the numerous barras-bar that exist in El Oro.

The particular nature of the barras-bar, described in chapter 2, makes this type of establishment one where young and attractive women offer eroticized services—sensual company, intimate talk, etc.—but not necessarily a direct exchange of sex for money. Even though these businesses are seen in El Oro as "clandestine brothels," the migrant women and barras-bar owners I interviewed rejected this label, and they traced differences between these bars and places offering paid sex. One of the managers I talked to assured me that men in Machala

tend to go to brothels and nightclubs less not only because they are "dangerous places" but especially because women in those venues do not accompany clients. "When I go out, I want to have a drink and chat in the company of nice girls, I don't go out looking for sex," he said, and he criticized women in nightclubs who pay attention only to those clients that "want to have a trick with them." In contrast, this man explained, barras-bar offer a nice, intimate, and secure environment. Female personnel, who serve drinks, chat, and dance with customers, create this kind of environment while stimulating alcohol consumption and thus increasing a business' profits.

Women working in barras-bar are aware that customers at these businesses are looking for close contact. "Men come with problems and they want us to listen to them," said Kruskaya, a 26-year-old Peruvian migrant. She and other migrants I interviewed complained about *clientes mañosos* (touchy or nasty clients) and barras-bar owners who pressure them into dancing with customers; yet some of these women also suggested that they take advantage of clients' demands for intimate and erotic contact.

The account of Cristina, a Peruvian woman who tried to save as much money as possible during the three or four months she spent in Puerto Bolivar each year, confirms this position:

> I dance with clients because I like to party, I like to dance, and because it brings more fun to the venue, it brings more clientele . . . . I also talk to clients because they feel happy if you spend some time talking to them, [but] I don't go with clients to make love in exchange for money, I just chat with them, and I give them a little kiss [laughs]. . . . When I dance with them I usually get tips. Sometimes I even ask for money directly. While we chat, I tell them that I have something urgent to buy and they give me 3, 4, even 5 dollars.

Contrary to other migrant women I interviewed, Cristina talked openly and sometimes a bit mischievously about the connections of intimacy and money in her work. Although Cristina and other migrants working in barras-bar made clear that sex was not part of their job, many of them were aware that allowing some kind of

bodily intimacy with clients help them get some extra money and thus complement the low salaries they receive as waitresses.

But even if relationships between participants in barras-bar contain different degrees of calculation and commodification, they do not exclude friendship, affection, and solidarity. Many migrants search for personal ties that allow them to complement their work life (defined by long working hours, stigma, and fears of migration controls) with moments of leisure and offered them support in critical moments, such as detentions and potential deportations. Therefore, close and long-term relationships that started in barras-bar were not rare among my informants. In point of fact, during my fieldwork, four of the 16 Peruvian women working in barras-bar I had in-depth interviews with moved in with former clients with whom they had established steady relationships. Two of them got pregnant as a result of these relationships. The rest of my informants established friendly ties with men they met in their working places, and some of them also engaged in short- or long-term romantic relations with them; Nancy was one of these women.

Originally from Chiclayo, northern Peru, Nancy moved to Ecuador in 2004 after receiving an offer to work in a barra-bar of Machala. She was 19 years old at that time, single and without children. When I first contacted her in 2006, this Peruvian migrant had worked in at least four of five different *barras.* This movement from one working place to another was necessary in order to find better working conditions and escape the "exploitation" of some employers, who paid salaries just a little bit higher than in domestic service but made women work for 10 and even 12 hours per day.[4]

As many other Peruvians I interviewed, Nancy did not like the atmosphere of barras-bar. However, she recognized that in these businesses she had met some "nice men." One of those "nice" men was a 47-year-old Ecuadorian wholesaler, with whom she got emotionally involved. "He's different from many young guys I met in the barras," she said. "He's respectful and kind." To demonstrate how nice her barras-bar friends were, Nancy talked about the "tips" and "presents" they offered her. She also stated that her *novio* was constantly looking after her, and to

prove this she showed me a plastic bag full of bills. The money her boyfriend usually gave her—she explained—served to pay trips to Peru and to buy things she could not afford with her salary as a barra-bar waitress:

> **Nancy**: There are 300 hundred dollars in here. My boyfriend gave it to me because I'm going to
> travel to Peru to visit my mother on her birthday. He gave me this money so I can buy a television for my mother's house . . . . Recently, my mother, brother, and nephews came to visit, and he paid for the [bus] tickets for all of them.
> **Author**: What kind of feelings do you have for this man?
> **Nancy**: I love him.

As I have explained throughout this dissertation, migrants with an irregular migration status are confronted with restrictions for legally accessing labor, they face exploitative working conditions, and they have no official channels to change this situation. Therefore, they rely on their customers/friends/boyfriends, and they make a strategic use of sex and love.

As Cheng (2007) explains for the case of Filipina entertainers working in U.S. military camp towns in South Korea, migrants use the "rhetoric of love" as a "moral framework" to manage their labor and negotiate their subordination. Thus, by defining their intimate relationships as "romance" or "love," women engaged in stigmatized activities avoid links to "prostitution," and they make use of intimacy to obtain material and other kinds of support. Cheng argues that when the state fails in its role of protection and the market does not provide workers with the benefits it promotes, intimacy and love offer low-income women a "weapon" to navigate their vulnerabilities and pursue their projects of aspiration, including those that they contemplated as part of the migration process. In a similar way, the story of Nancy shows that the romantic relationship she established with her former client and present boyfriend and the regular economic assistance she received from him allowed her to complement her meager salary and maintain transnational ties through remittances, gifts, and periodic visits to and from Peru.

But although sexual-affective relationships serve to negotiate inequalities in sites of displacement (Padilla et al. 2007), it is important to keep in mind that intimacy in general and love in particular are not individual experiences disconnected from structural forces and relations of power. Different studies show that in global capitalism intimacy is inseparable from consumptive practices, market forces, and different power relations (e.g. Constable 2009; Faier 2007). Therefore, Nancy's intimate bond with her Ecuadorian *novio* was definitely marked by migration inequalities and hierarchies of gender, class, and age.

Indeed, Nancy and other migrants I interviewed in El Oro recounted that their boyfriends were very jealous and exercised different forms of control over them. These Ecuadorian men also put pressure on their migrant girlfriends in order to make them leave their work in barras-bar, offering to support them financially in exchange. Some of my informants agreed to these offers, only to soon realize that they were too dependent on their partners. Additionally, the irregular migration status of many Colombian and Peruvian women motivated solidarity and support from their male Ecuadorian partners who sometimes proposed a legalization process through marriage. Simultaneously, an irregular migration status and the foreignness of Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador became elements through which some Ecuadorian men threatened and controlled their migrant wives and lovers.

Before closing this section, it is worth mentioning that connections between intimacy and commerce are also and especially common in the informal spaces of sexual commerce that take place outside the public spaces of the sex industry, such as escort services and erotic transactions individually announced through local journals and online erotic pages. These services are publicized as "high quality," not only because they are offered to middle- and upper-class clients but also because they offer closeness, care, affection, as well as the confidentiality and security that are not perceived as part of the public spaces of the sex industry. Two online advertisements that offered intimate services in El Oro exemplify this:

> *Chicas dan trato de novia a caballeros de alta gama. 100% confidencialidad y seguridad* [Young women offer a girlfriend treatment to high class gentlemen. 100% confidentiality and security]. (Published on the web in May 2010).

> *Soy estudiante universitaria. Trato de pareja. Amorosa, confiable. Solo solventes.* [I'm a university student (woman). (I offer a) partner's treatment. (I'm) loving, reliable. Only for solvent (men).] (Published on the web on May 2010).

But online advertisements publicize not only erotic services but also "occasional relationships." This confirms the existence of other forms of intimate-economic transactions that take place in daily life and outside the framework of prostitution and sex work.

The materiality of everyday intimacy

Intimate-material exchanges are not restricted to the formal and informal spaces of the sex industry. They frequently take place in non-labor contexts and are connected to flexible arrangements of everyday life. Moreover, as the two online advertisements I include below suggest, informal relationships mixing intimacy and material gain are distinct from prostitution and sex work. For some people in El Oro, the former are seen as involving "educated" and (morally) "healthy" individuals—such as "house girls" and "students"—that exchange sex for money or other material rewards in periods of economic difficulties:

> Looking for a friend for intimate moments as a couple, in exchange I offer great economic help. [I look for] house girls, university students . . . . single, without children. I'm a healthy person, well educated, without vices or problems with anybody, hard worker . . . . I don't want prostitutes, just reserved house girls. (Published on the web on April 2010).

> Help for your studies or something else in exchange for XXX. Hello, I'm a very discrete professional that offers economic help to girls over 17 years old, discrete, nice, and that enjoy going out to have fun . . . . I don't want *chicas pre-pago* or prostitutes, and even less gays. (Published on the web on April 2010).

Some Colombian and Peruvian migrants engage in these complex and ambiguous daily life relationships that combine different forms of intimacy and material gain. My informants did not define these relationships as prostitution or sex work either. Rather, they considered them part of broader relationships that mix friendship, companionship, sex, gifts, and financial assistance, helping them access resources and alleviate economic difficulties.

When I met Lola, a 29 year-old Colombian migrant, she had just arrived in Ecuador after splitting up with her partner in Colombia. To get away from her conflictive relationship, she decided to spend some time in a country where she had family members. "When I left Colombia, my plan was to get a *mozo* [literally a young man, but understood as an intimate friend or lover] and receive economic help from him," she said very openly. Lola was thinking of engaging in this type of relationship because she had to support her five-year-old son, who had stayed with her mother in Armenia (central Colombia) and was not receiving any economic support from his father. "I had met some Ecuadorian men, they are kind but they are not very generous," she told me somewhat preoccupied.

A similar story was recounted by Mariana, another Colombian migrant. Recalling her life in her hometown, Cali, this woman mentioned that in Colombia she had only had "decent jobs." Mariana worked as a self-employed cleaner in houses and offices in Cali. With her irregular salary she supported her mother and two children. But when times were difficult, when work was scarce and she was in debt, Mariana used to go out with *amigos* to dance and sometimes to have sex in exchange for money. When this migrant moved to Ecuador she planned on doing something similar: "I thought of finding a man that could support me and my family in Colombia," she said. As Mariana waited for a "generous man," she worked in El Oro nightclubs and from time to time she accompanied foreign men (usually Russians) that arrived in banana cargo ships in outings. "These men like to go out with dark-skinned girls like me, but they do not want prostitutes," Mariana explained.

Different studies illustrate that there is a widespread link between sexual intimacy and material exchanges in everyday life, where participants themselves define these intimate-material exchanges as beyond the framework of prostitution or sex work. Focusing on the Brazilian context, Piscitelli mentions relationships between young women and older, richer men who provide money and different sorts of goods. The "'*velho que ajuda*' (old man that helps) is a widely known, long-lasting tradition all over Brazil, and a recognized means of social mobility for different social classes," this author explains (2007: 496). The work of Amalia Cabezas (2009) examines the transnational encounters between tourists from the global North and locals in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. She defines these types of relationships as "tactical sex," that is, the strategic use of sexuality in sporadic, flexible, and contingent relationships that alleviate economic hardship without foreclosing the chance to find solace, companionship, and friends.[5] Cabezas underscores that in "tactical sex" the lines between intimacy and commerce are rather blurry:

> There is a conscious use of sex and affect to relieve economic necessity, even if it is resorted to only intermittently. Tactical sex is one of various short-term strategies used to get by and to prosper. The exchange of sexuality, however, does not encompass the entire experience in question. It is just one component that is present—inconsistently and differently—in many situations where it is difficult to distinguish the boundary between market and nonmarket transactions (Cabezas 2009: 120).

Although sporadic intimate-economic arrangements are in some ways similar to sex work, such as multiple-partner relationships underscored by the giving of cash or gifts, there are also important differences. First, in "tactical" or "strategic" sexual arrangements, participants are constructed as *amigos* and *amigas* and never as "clients" and "sex workers." Furthermore, women who use sex as a transaction in flexible daily life arrangements do not see themselves as workers engaged in an economic or labor activity. Secondly, in daily life intimate-economic arrangements, the exchange of sex for gifts, money, or other material rewards tends to create

different social ties, and often a broader set of obligations than that of sex work relationships.

In order to look beyond prostitution and sex work and explore the "materiality of everyday sex," some authors have examined the link between gifts and sex in the stories of women that are quite distant from the sex industry (Hunter 2002). In contrast, in my fieldwork I found that some of my informants were engaged in sporadic and ambiguous daily life relationships that mixed intimacy and materiality while also engaging in sex work. However, the migrant women I talked to not only distinguished between these two types of encounters but also felt differently in relation to them. The sporadic intimate encounters with *amigos*, taking place in private locations and involving *regalos* (gifts, either goods or cash money) rather than "payment" were perceived as less morally condemnable than sexual services in brothels and nightclubs.

Additionally, my interviewees suggested that intimate-material relations with friends created more space for leisure (dance outings, trips, etc.), intimate talk, and companionship, allowing them to experience "real" emotional attraction and sexual desire, feelings that they often repress while working in the sex industry.[6] This shows that intimacy, affect, and claims of "authenticity" personalize the commercial exchange (Cheng 2007) and permit participants to claim a sense of humanity that makes the commodified relationships they engage in more acceptable (Faier 2007). Two episodes narrated by Katty illustrate these points.

In 2000, Katty made a short visit to Ecuador. In this first journey, she was traveling with a Colombian girl friend who had contacts in Ecuadorian brothels. They went to a touristic city in the central area of the Ecuadorian coast during the carnival holiday intending to work hard, save money, and return to Colombia few days later. But Katty was exhausted and stressed out, and she decided to take the first afternoon off. She ended up in a cockfight where she met a "special person". She recounted that story in this way.

Katty: He was a landowner, I think he liked me … so we started talking and became friends. He asked me if I could be his *caponera* [the woman who accompanies a cockfight enthusiast]. I said yes and sat beside him; then we drank whisky, and we watched the fight. He asked me what was I doing in Ecuador, and I told him the truth; I didn't feel like telling lies, I didn't want to block the sun with a finger [because I thought] that he could see me [in the brothel]. So I told him: 'I came here to work.' Then, as he had won several [cock] fights, *me regaló* (he gave me) 20 dollars. And the five days I stayed in that town … I practically didn't work because I used to spend the whole day with him. He came to pick me up at my hotel, then we went to his farm, and there we had sex.

Author: Did he pay for that?

Katty: No, he gave me money, I mean, when he invited me to eat or so, but he didn't actually give me money because he felt kind of ashamed, and I also felt ashamed of asking, so I always waited for him to give me [money]. [Once] he told me: I don't want you to go there [to the brothel], and then he gave me some money because I told him that I had to go. … He was very nice to me … I mean, I was not with him only for the money, but also because … since I first saw him, I felt something like a magnet, I felt attracted to him, I liked him.

One year later, Katty moved to Ecuador once again, but then she settled in Machala. She worked in several nightclubs for three years until migration controls increased significantly. Due to her irregular migration status and two detention experiences, she decided to stop working in public and controlled places. Therefore, Katty opted for relying on the *amigos* she had made during her years in the sex sector of El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces. She started contacting her friends (most of them former clients) by mobile phone and meeting them in private places or accompanying them on trips and outings. "They phone when they want me to accompany them," she explained. "I have one good friend in Quito who calls me two or three times a month, so I travel and I meet him there, and I have another friend in Loja," a city not so far from Machala.

Although Katty's friends phone unexpectedly and sometimes irregularly, and this means that she sometimes faces periods when her income is very limited, she nonetheless prefers this to working in nightclubs, something that she still has to do from time to time. According to this migrant woman, meeting friends in private

places and getting economic support from them not only protects her from police raids and detentions in public and visible sites of the sex sector but also wards off sexual intercourse with numerous men. "I have my friends, and I prefer to be just with them," Katty said, "*así no tengo que estar con uno y con otro*" (that way I don't have to sleep around).

Apart from acknowledging the economic benefits of these intimate relationships, which allow Katty to support herself as well as her daughter, who lives with her in Ecuador, this Colombian migrant also recognizes the emotional support and solidarity of men that she defines as "very nice and very special friends." "*Me han regalado muchas cosas, a veces sin necesidad de yo irme a acostar con ellos"* (they have given me a lot of things, sometimes without even having to sleep with them), she said, while recalling a difficult moment in Ecuador and the support she received from one of those friends.

> The other time I had a big necessity, my daughter became ill, and I didn't have anyone I could rely on. So the first person I thought of was a friend, he's a miner. I told him: look, I need this, and I explained that the doctor had prescribed the girl some vitamins that cost like 75 dollars, so I asked him if he could lend me or give me [that money]. I never asked him for money like that … never, we always go and have sex, and then yes, he gives me money, say, for something. But asking for money just like that, no, I felt very ashamed, but that time I really needed [the money] with urgency … *Y él me la regaló* [and he gave it to me as a gift].

Rendering visible the connection between intimacy and money makes Katty uneasy, and this is articulated in the "shame" she feels about asking for money directly to intimate friends and lovers. In other words, crossing the lines between commodified and non-commodified intimacy provokes concerns and feelings of embarrassment, a topic I explore in the last section of this chapter.

But before going into that, I want to emphasize the importance of taking into consideration the way people themselves understand and define their sexual and intimate experiences. I have already said that women offering eroticized services and those engaged in freelance sporadic exchanges of sex, intimacy, and money do not see the material rewards received from men as "payment." Rather,

they define them as "tips," "gifts," or "*ayudas*" (financial assistance) given them by men to whom they refer as "friends" or "boyfriends," not as "clients." Zelizer (2005) explains this as "negotiations of meanings and boundaries," and she argues that in all intimate relationships but especially in those that involve economic transactions, participants devote significant effort to draw distinctions with other social ties that may resemble them but that ultimately have different consequences for the parties. These distinctions are drawn through the adoption of distinctive names, symbols, practices, and media of exchange, which differentiate, for example, a romantic liaison from prostitution. In a similar vein, Cabezas (2004) argues that the reluctance to characterize intimate relationships as strictly commercial endeavors is an expression of participants' desire to expand and create multiple possibilities for these relationships while preserving their dignity. The latter is quite important for women that are socially stigmatized, degraded, and dehumanized due to their involvement in activities that mix sex and money.

Consequently, even if the boundaries between intimate and material exchanges are often blurred in the context of daily life, participants involved in ambiguous relationships mixing sex, affection, and material gain make efforts to draw distinctions with intimate encounters that have similarities but are perceived negatively, such as sex work. These efforts to negotiate boundaries certainly express fears about crossing the lines between "good" and "bad" sex, or mixing affective relationships with commercial transactions.

Fears about crossing boundaries

Moral controversies about the interconnections of intimacy and material exchanges are related to the social meaning people give to love or "real" affective relationships, which are supposed to be pure and without monetary calculation. Recent studies and critical scholars have not only questioned the naturalization and essentialization of love as something intimate and independent from economic,

social, and political forces, hierarchies and relations of power (e.g. Padilla et al. 2007); they have also complicated the supposedly clear and stable boundaries between commodified and non-commodified intimate relationships, showing that these boundaries are constructed in specific contexts and in relation to class, gender and race lines.

The work of Brennan (2004), Piscitelli (2007), and Cabezas (2009), who study heterosexual relationships taking place in international tourism settings of the Caribbean and Brazil, suggests that fears about the mixing of intimate relations and material transactions are related to deeper concerns about the crossing of racial and class lines involved in transnational encounters. In the stories presented by these scholars, intimate relations between poor, dark-skinned local women and white middle-class male tourists from rich countries are viewed with suspicion by local populations because they are perceived as *relaciones por interés* (relations based on material interest) or directly defined as prostitution even if some of these relations certainly are not. Likewise, locals perceive intimate-material relations that sometimes include marriage as intentional stepping stones for international migrants, and thus they are defined as marriages *por residencia* (for visas).

In my work, heterosexual relationships that mingle intimacy and economic exchanges involve people with relatively similar class and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, participants in and observers of these intimate-economic relationships are concerned with the defense of moral boundaries, and the crossing of national lines and the potential threat to widely defended national origin hierarchies.

Indeed, many Ecuadorians see intimate relations between "nationals" and "foreigners" with fear and suspicion due to the potential commercialization of love and of the "sacred institution of marriage." Behind these fears, though, there are broader concerns about the use of these relationships by migrants to obtain certain rights in the country: rights like residence and labor that, according to many local people, should be restricted to Ecuadorian citizens. A staff member of the Ecuadorian consulate in Piura (northern Peru, close to the Ecuadorian border), for instance, expressed her deep concerns about intimate relations between Peruvian

women and Ecuadorian men because she was worried that they would provoke an "exaggerated" demand for rights. This governmental official considered that behind these intimate relationships were the self-evident interests of Peruvian migrants. These interests, she suggested, put pressure on Ecuadorian state institutions and are the result of a "dangerous" border opening:

> One sees horrifying things at the border. Many Peruvian women have relationships with Ecuadorian men, and they come here and furiously demand the Ecuadorian residence because they have had children born in Ecuador. Before, there was a different attitude; they [Peruvian women engaged with Ecuadorian men] did not demand [their rights], but they asked for help. There are also Peruvian women who come [here] and protest because they want their Ecuadorian partners to recognize their children and pay them alimony.

While I was writing this thesis, Cuban migration into Ecuador increased significantly, and soon the media and national authorities began to warn about "fraudulent marriages" used by Cuban citizens to regularize their migration status in the country. The widespread media coverage of "arranged marriages" has stigmatized all relationships between Cubans and Ecuadorians, which now are generally seen as "false" and stimulated by "personal interest," instead of "real feelings." But these analyses have ignored the difficulties that Cubans and other intra-regional migrants face to get access to permanent residence and labor rights in Ecuador, and the ways in which migration restrictions push them to pay for and arrange marriages with Ecuadorian citizens. These difficulties and restrictions also affect Colombian and Peruvian migrants who, in spite of regional integration projects, fundamentally enjoy the right to free circulation.

Therefore, some of my informants considered that relying on affective relationships with Ecuadorian men, either lovers or potential husbands, was the only possibility left for them to respond to migration restrictions.

According to a government employee of the National Registry Office, one of the consequences of "false sentimental relationships" is that the "sacred institution of marriage is prostituted" (quoted in DEP 2010b: 21). Perceptions like

this one stimulated the adoption of legal dispositions to prevent more "arranged marriages" by imposing new requirements, first on Cuban citizens and then on other groups of foreigners attempting to marry Ecuadorians (see DPE 2010b). These restrictive measures created new difficulties for the permanent regularization of certain migrant groups, and thus they revealed the intrinsic connections between the state's effort to defend official morality and simultaneously protect national borders/boundaries. As an official document that justified and approved of these restrictive measures indicated:

> [D]ue to the alarming increase of fraudulent marriages with the purpose of illegitimately achieving the Ecuadorian nationality, it is necessary to safeguard legal institutions like marriage, national sovereignty, and Ecuadorian borders. [7]

The merging of intimacy and material transactions in different spheres of social life is rather common in capitalist societies and transnational contexts where certain individuals —migrant women among them— are confronted with inequalities and are integrated into the global economy through the commodification of sex, care, and affection. Nonetheless, this common occurrence motivates public concerns, and it also perplexes participants because of a common belief that economic rationality and intimate ties contradict each other, as the epigraph I included at the beginning of this chapter indicates. According to sociologist Vivian Zelizer, there are two different views that express common beliefs about the supposed conflicts in the mingling of intimacy and materiality.

The first position is based on the dualistic perception that intimate relationships and economic activities are two distinct domains of social life or "separate spheres," that operate according to different principles: rationality, planning, efficiency, on the one hand, solidarity, sentiment, impulse, on the other. Thus, those defending this point of view argue that the mingling of these two spheres will inevitably result in "contamination," "disorder," and moral strife.

The second position considers that the mingling of intimacy and economy is "nothing but another version of normal market activity, nothing but a form of

cultural expression, or nothing but an exercise of power" (Zelizer 2005: 21). The most common version of this position states pragmatically that markets are everywhere; thus, love, sex, and personal care are commodities like any other. Another version of this position is the one defended by some feminist scholars who see the intersection between sexual intimacy and commercial transactions as nothing but the result of coercive, patriarchal power structures.

Zelizer explains that theories of "separate spheres" and "nothing but" fail in not recognizing "how regularly intimate relationships coexist with economic transactions, without apparent damage to either one" (2006: 306). Such interconnections, however, do not function in any way as retail markets, this scholar asserts.

Following Zelizer among other authors exploring the links between intimacy and economic transactions, I would argue that instead of drawing rigid moral boundaries between intimate and commodified relationships, "pure" and materialized sex, an alternative way of understanding the mingling of intimacy and economy/commerce is recognizing that there is a continuum between these two spheres. In this continuum there is a wide range of sexual-economic relationships, from marriage—an institution that is commodified in different ways by men and women—to occasional or longer lasting sexual relationships with friends, "paying fiancés," "subscription lovers," and regular clients in the case of women in prostitution (see for example the work of Tabet 1989).

I argue that the commodification of sex, friendship, romance, and marriage, and the romanticizing of commercial sex and eroticized services within the context of migration are strategies that marginalized migrant women rely on to negotiate the restrictions and inequalities that mark most migration processes. As Gloria González-López (2005) explains about Mexican migrants in the U.S: under conditions of class, racial/ethnic, and citizenship inequality, migrant women and men "play out their few choices via their sexualized bodies" (p. 209).

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, by highlighting the interconnections of intimacy and economic exchanges, I have tried to complicate the boundaries between commodified and non-commodified sex and question overly binary conceptual distinctions: private-public, intimate-impersonal, emotional-material, romance-money. Whether in sex work activities, eroticized services, or in daily life intimate encounters, Colombian and Peruvian migrants in Ecuador confuse the boundaries between market and non-market relations, and they reveal the nuanced, flexible, contingent, and uncertain lines that often exist between intimacy and economy. Work, leisure, and romance are also confused in these intimate-material relations.

The strategic use that Colombian and Peruvian migrants make of sex and intimacy also reveals how these women articulate agency within a context of gender, class, and translational inequalities and power relations. Offering close, caring, and "loving moments" to their clients and strategically combining sex, companionship, romance, and money with friends and boyfriends allow these migrants to respond to the difficulties and potentials of their migration experience in ways that both contest and reproduce structures of power.

Indeed, low-income migrants use intimacy to escape economic hardship and restrictive migration regulations, and to pursue their projects of aspiration more broadly. However, in this process, they also reproduce traditional gender relations. As I have illustrated with the stories of Katty and Nancy, men and women engage in what Cheng (2007) defines as "gender-appropriate exchanges." That is: men become women's protectors and they offer them material support, either in difficult times or permanently, while women proffer care and loving moments and offer themselves sexually. Similarly, hierarchical versions of citizenship are both challenged and reproduced in intimate-material relations taking place in migration contexts. An example of this is working-class migrants' strategic use of the "sacred institution of marriage." As the story of Caroline illustrated, marrying Ecuadorian citizens allow marginalized women to regularize their migration status and thus

access residency and labor rights. In so doing, though, migrants confirm that being a national citizen or having intimate links with one of them open up opportunities and offer preferential access to rights.

Commodified relationships also reveal that intimacy and materiality not only connect within labor relationships in the sex sector, but also within friendship and romance. Whether "real" or "false," friendship and romance are also sites from which migrant women negotiate their subordination and struggle to move ahead.

CONCLUSIONS

RETHINKING SEXUAL COMMERCE AND FEMALE INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATIONS

This research project was motivated by the scarcity of studies about migrants in the sex industry from a migration research framework and the still limited attention paid to the voices and arguments of this migrant group in discussions about transnational sexual commerce. But as I examined the stories and narratives of Peruvian and Colombian migrants in the Ecuadorian province of El Oro, and I analyzed the structures guiding their migration and erotic experiences, I realized that there were more issues at stake behind these experiences. The stories of these migrants allowed me to look at the particularities of south-south migrations, which are largely ignored in migration literature, and they revealed more complex notions of borders and sexual commerce. Therefore, my work integrated three bodies of literature, and it explored the ways in which migration, sexuality, and borders are interconnected in the lives of these migrant women.

By looking at Peruvian and Colombian women engaged in a variety of intimate-material relations from the perspective of migration studies, this research examined different aspects of these migrants' lives, and it did not restrict their migration experiences to their sexual encounters. These women were seen as part of a larger group of intra-regional migrants that undertake temporary, circular, or permanent migration movements from Peru and Colombia into Ecuador, taking advantage of dollarized wages, geographic proximity, and a free-entry visa regime. Locating the experiences of my informants within this broader migration process allowed me to see these women as migrants and active border crossers rather than as sexual actors or sexual victims, as other studies on the topic often do.

Likewise, my theoretical approach helped me recognize that the experiences of Colombian and Peruvian migrants engaged in different intimate-material relations have both commonalities with other working-class migrant

women in Ecuador, as well as differences and particularities. Sexuality—understood as an axis of power that produces both "normal" and "not-normal" subjects, wanted and unwanted migrants—guides these differences, and it becomes an element that presents migrant women in the sex trade with particular opportunities and limitations.

The difference sexuality makes in migration and border contexts

This dissertation claimed that migrants' experiences in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations are highly heterogeneous. However, it also emphasized that a common aspect among these migrants is the fact that their marginal sexualities distinguish them from other migrant groups as well as from "national women."

I explained that normative notions of female sexuality, and their intersections with nationality stereotypes, have produced Colombian and Peruvian women in Ecuador in general as exotic and erotic figures, and Colombian and Peruvian migrants in the Ecuadorian sex trade in particular as sexually deviant or sexual victims. I called this differentiation process in which sexuality and nationality overlap and naturalize distinctions and hierarchies between "nationals" and "foreigners" the sexual stigmatization of national origin. This process is particularly salient in migration contexts where other markers of difference—such as ethnicity, race, and class—are not so prominent. This is the case with the Andean sub-region of South America, and more specifically with its interconnected border regions.

Indeed, in a border region like El Oro that has gone through rapid and relatively recent transformations—including the permanent opening of its border with Peru and increasing labor migrations into the province—the image of Colombian and Peruvian women in the local sex trade is prominent in the discourses of borderland inhabitants. These migrants are depicted by many Ecuadorian men as "warm," "friendly," and "joyful," more sexually open and

appealing than Ecuadorian women, and thus especially "suited" for paid sexual relations (chapter 1). These exoticized/eroticized images stimulate gendered and sexualized labor demand and recruitment processes that guide Peruvians' and Colombians' marginalized incorporation in the informal Ecuadorian labor market (chapters 2 and 3).

But Colombian and Peruvian women in the El Oro sex trade are also and especially marked by negative stereotypes. They are portrayed as "clandestine prostitutes" and vectors of sexually transmitted infections, "illegal aliens," or victims of sex trafficking "mafias." These portrayals provoke fears and public anxieties among border populations. I argued that these anxieties reveal broader concerns about "invaded" or "violated" borders and the vulnerable boundaries of a community that is being particularly altered by sub-regional integration agreements. In other words, fears about "violating" or "violated" bodies concur with fears about "violated" borders, and this encourages tighter controls and migration restrictions targeting particular groups of migrants.

Consequently, the symbolic boundaries between "us" and "others," "nationals" and "foreigners," "good" and "bad" migrants (investors, highly-qualified, regularized, and moral, versus impoverished, unskilled, "illegal," and immoral), drawn through sexual and moral distinctions, are materialized and institutionalized through selective and restrictive migration regulations and tighter border controls. These restrictions and controls are an attempt to redraw the territorial limits of the Ecuadorian state. In this way, the migration control apparatus not only responds to sexual concerns and national considerations, such as internal security and public order, but it also reproduces sexual and national origin hierarchies, as discussed in chapter 4.

One of the contributions of my work is the fact that a territorially focused study of borders and border-crossings helps explain how state power operates in a concrete territory and in the margins of the state. A territorially focused study also allows to illustrate the material consequences—and not only the symbolic significances—that border divisions have for migrant populations in general and

for migrant women in the sex trade in particular. Certainly, controls, detentions, and exclusions are part of these consequences. In El Oro, these controls are directed in large degree towards Peruvians and Colombians, and they take place not only at official checkpoints but also in sites perceived as "invaded" by "illegal migrant workers." Sex businesses are among these sites. They are seen as "hazardous locations," and for this reason they are put under a network of surveillance that includes health authorities, anti-delinquency police agents, migration officials, and private actors like journalists, employers, and local workers. Curiously, sex businesses, whether formal or informal, are also and deeply integrated in the economic and social life of El Oro. Chapter 2 explained that these businesses are a source of labor and income for numerous unskilled and impoverished workers, both locals and migrants.

Hence, this dissertation illustrated how sexuality informs modes of inclusion/exclusion in migration contexts. Peruvian and Colombian women are incorporated into the border geography of El Oro as exotic and erotic figures and then sought after in the local sex sector. Simultaneously, migrants in the sex trade—in contrast to migrant women working in domestic service—face greater difficulties to legally work and reside in Ecuador, and they are put under additional surveillance due to the stereotypes that depict them as sexual threats or sexual victims.

The above confirms that sexuality structures different aspects of migration, such as migrant women's incorporation in segmented labor markets and sexualized jobs, migration policies, and migrants' broader integration in destination. Likewise, it shows that migration and sexuality come together to select and control migration flows and concurrently to regulate female sexualities.

South-South intra-regional migrations and the limits of integration projects

The connections between migration, sexuality, and borders/boundaries have been examined in interesting and relatively recent studies that were cited along this

dissertation. These studies, however, focus on south-to-north migration movements while leaving unmentioned the particular ways in which these connections manifest in south-south intra-regional migrations and among people with similar cultural, ethnic, and class backgrounds.

Exploring the contemporary migration movements within the Andean sub-region of South America showed that those coming from the other side of the border are seen as "dangerously close," not only in geographically speaking but also ethnically and culturally speaking. As "foreigners" that can easily pass as "nationals" due to a common language and similar physical appearance, the migration experiences of Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian province of El Oro expose the arbitrariness of boundaries between peoples and nations. My informants' experiences also reveal the ways in which state agents and private actors stress differences between members and non-members of the nation-state to erase identity ambiguities and maintain hierarchical forms of citizenship. Thus, contrary to most migration and border literature that concentrates on race and class as elements of differentiation and hierarchization between "nationals" and "foreigners," I emphasized the role of sexualization and national origin distinctions as markers of difference and justifications for restrictions and exclusions, as explained above.

But despite limitations and restrictions, Colombian and Peruvian migrants find opportunities in short distance south-south migrations. Trans-border movements within the Andean sub-region are facilitated by geographic proximity and porous/integrated borders that allow formal and informal border-crossings. For this reason, the Colombian and Peruvian migrants I interviewed highlighted the advantages they found in their movements into Ecuador that allow them to move back and forth and remain in close contact with relatives back home. Within this particular migration process, women in the sex industry are confronted with risks like human smuggling and debt-bondage with less frequency because geographic proximity and a visa-free entry reduce traveling and documentation costs. Likewise, historical trans-border movements in the Andean sub-region provide

border crossers with social connections or job contacts in destination, preventing them from resorting to criminal organizations.

My exploration of south-south intra-regional migrations also brought to the fore the interesting but still rarely studied trans-border dynamics of South America,[1] where integration agreements coexist with new divisions and barriers. Economic, social, and cultural networks across South American border territories have been formalized through integration accords that strengthened in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. My work underscores, however, that regional and sub-regional integration projects cannot be seen as the disappearance of borders, an idea that is rather common in some analyses about regionalization and globalization.[2] Current dynamics in South American borders indicate that it is precisely regionalization and globalization processes and the state policies that come with them that have redefined contemporary borders, making them fade in some ways and reappear in others. As Alejandro Grimson (2001: 99) says in relation to borders in the Southern Cone of South America: "while the 'paranoia' over [territorial] sovereignty has faded into the background, the panic over movement begins to take center stage. From the obsession over space we have moved to an obsession over flows; the obsession of multiplying flows coming 'from above' and restricting flows coming 'from below'" (translation is mine).

Consequently, this ethnographic research exposed the limits and contradictions of regional and sub-regional integration projects and the need for deeper critical analyses of these projects. It showed that the romantic metaphor of "brotherhood" that is used to define relations between Andean nations and their populations is sometimes empty or merely diplomatic rhetoric. Moreover, when this rhetoric of brotherhood is deployed by diplomats, national/local authorities and ordinary people in border (as well as in many interior) cities, it can obscure or prevent the recognition and thus the resolution of the tensions and power relations that still occur between border regions and neighboring countries involved in integration projects.

In the Andean sub-region, integration accords aim to consolidate an integrated space, with open borders, free circulation, and a broader and more inclusive notion of citizenship, as various official documents indicate. In practice, though, the rhetoric of brotherhood and the ideals of universal, Latin American or Andean citizenship[3] have been overshadowed by nationalist ideologies and practices and the stigmatizing prejudices many local people have against those coming from neighboring countries. Integration projects in this (and other) part(s) of the world have been also limited by a global securitist agenda that is guided by a series of "panics" over cross-border movements: drug and human trafficking, goods smuggling, "illegal migrations," transnational crime, and "moral panics" about the autonomous and unaccompanied movement of women.

Thus, although many border areas in the Andean sub-region are seen as spaces of "real integration," current national security concerns, fuelled by "invasion" narratives and the construction of borders as zones of disorder and subversion, have become an obstacle to border integration processes. In addition, the security discourse has impeded the study of social, cultural, and other "human dynamics" of border regions—as van Schendel (2005) asserts—and has turned public policies towards borders zones back to the notion of defense. Actually, in Ecuador violence, (in)security, and criminality concentrate the attention of scholars studying and writing about borders (which are usually academics from central cities and rarely actors from border provinces), while other topics connected to border regions have practically gone unnoticed.[4]

Sex, intimacy, and commerce: blurring the boundaries, struggling to move ahead

Commercial sexual activities have usually been understood and dealt with from two main perspectives, which I proved limited when trying to explain the various and ambiguous relationships women engage in in cross-border settings. The first perspective conflates commercial sex with "sexual enslavement"; the second one,

which was the starting point for this research project, understands commercial sex as an alternative form of labor.

Drawing on Colombian and Peruvian migrants' intimate-material experiences, this study illustrated, in the first place, that the sex industry is highly diversified. It comprises a wide range of activities, not only sex-for-money exchanges but also eroticized services. The latter do not necessarily include sexual intercourse but rather the use of female bodies to provoke erotic fantasies and thus stimulate consumption, as in barras-bar. Additionally, it showed that some of the intimate-material encounters that migrants engage in are not restricted to the public spaces of the sex industry, and they are not defined as prostitution or sex work by the participants themselves. Some Colombian and Peruvian migrants engage in sporadic relationships that combine friendship, companionship, sex, eroticism, and different forms of material gain, such as "gifts" and material support given by friends and boyfriends as part of daily life interactions.

Hence, I questioned the use of all-encompassing categories to describe different relationships mixing sex, eroticism, and commerce, or intimacy and materiality more broadly. First, I problematized the conflation of transnational sexual commerce with sex trafficking because this conflation implies that migrants in the sex industry face homogenous experiences of violence and oppression. Further, the discourse of "sexual enslavement" ignores the agency exercised and the risks assumed by women that cross borders to negotiate their marginalization. Contrary to these victimizing and homogenizing discourses, my informants defined themselves as "audacious," and they expressed changing and conflicting meanings and feelings about their involvement in the sex trade. They recognized commercial sex as a means to overcome economic difficulties and open up opportunities that were otherwise closed for themselves and their families. At the same time, their narratives suggested that their engagement in a highly stigmatized and unprotected labor sector caused emotional distress (eased to a certain degree by being away from relatives and friends) and made them vulnerable to abusive controls,

detentions, bribe demands, deportations, mistreatment from clients, and labor exploitation.

Secondly, I exposed the limits of the concept of "sex work(er)". This political concept has been essential in the organization of women in the sex trade and their struggles for respect and rights as it shifted debates from moral to economic and labor terms and from criminalizing to human rights approaches. I myself have been using this concept in my activism with organized sex workers. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork I realized that the concept "sex work" does not adequately define the flexible, informal, and contingent relationships that women (and men) in capitalist economies engaged in, especially relationships that take place outside the context of labor. In addition, defining all women involved in intimate-material encounters as "sex workers" has the risk of fixing the identity of these women, as my informants alerted.

As trans-border migrants with (for the most part) irregular migration statuses, some of them moving back and forth between Ecuador and their origin countries, the Colombian and Peruvian women I interviewed perceived their involvement in the Ecuadorian sex trade as a temporary and even incidental activity. Therefore, they were not interested in visibilizing their presence as organized sex workers, and they resisted the concept of "sex work" because they felt that this term fixed a temporary income-generating activity into a permanent sort of profession. This shows that the "global" concept of sex work is assumed and interpreted differently, depending on local contexts and the multiple subject positions of those involved in commercial sexual activities. Although this concept is still a powerful tool for collective action and to fight against the abuses and stigmatization affecting women in the sex industry, it cannot be imposed on every woman that engages in relationships mixing sex, eroticism, and commerce, or intimacy and materiality more broadly.

Indeed, my informants' experiences illustrate that contrary to the rigid and moralistic boundaries commonly drawn between affective and commercial relationships, "pure" and commodified sex, the intimate relationships of

Colombian and Peruvian migrants blur the lines between intimacy and commerce, emotionality and material gain (chapter 6). The commodification of sex, friendship, romance, and marriage within the context of migration, and the romanticizing of commercial sex and eroticized services expose the ways in which different working-class women, and not only organized sex workers, make strategic use of sex and emotionality to respond to migration restrictions and enhance their life chances. These commodified relationships show that intimacy and materiality connect not only within labor relationships in the sex industry but also within daily life interactions of friendship and romance. In the latter cases, the concept of "sex work" is especially inadequate.

Subsequently, more complex analyses are necessary in order to enrich our understandings of the erotics. A way of doing so, according to Agustín (2005), could be a cultural-studies approach to commercial sex. This approach would:

> …look at commercial sex in its widest sense, examining its intersections with art, ethics, consumption, family life, entertainment, sport, economics, urban space, sexuality, tourism and criminality, not omitting issues of race, class, gender, identity and citizenship. An approach that considers commercial sex as culture would look for the everyday practices involved and try to reveal how our societies distinguish between activities considered normatively 'social' and activities denounced as morally wrong. This means examining a range of activities that take in both commerce and sex (p. 619).

Even though my informants reproduced notions of commercial sex as "indecent" and "not-normal," they also contested simple understandings of migrants' experiences in the sex industry, and they brought up nuances and complexities, as I have explained in this section. Given the gap found between hegemonic discourses about migrant women in commercial sexual relations (in mass-media, governmental and non-governmental reports and some academic work) and the narratives and arguments of the women involved in these relations, I claim that researchers and other actors examining commercial sex in local, national, or transnational contexts (feminist groups and human rights activists, for example)

need to connect their analyses more to the way people make sense of and understand their own lives and erotic experiences.

My claim is rooted in a critical body of work in the social sciences—particularly anthropology and especially from feminist academics—in which the relations of power and knowledge that connect researchers and research subjects are put under profound and self-conscious reflection (Haraway 1988; Harding 1993; Abhu-Lughod 1993; Behar and Gordon 1995). This critical work underscores the theoretical potential that women's (including migrants') stories and experiences offer, and they alert researchers to the dangers of imposing personal values and generalizing categories on complex and multifaceted experiences (Bourdieu 1996). In this way, it becomes possible to give research subjects a different role (Bocaggni 2011) and at best change their condition from "othered" and spoken for figures to participant actors that can speak for themselves. This has been the case with some sex workers and migrants groups that engage not only in human rights activism but also in knowledge production.[5]

Re-politicizing the debate

When I started my fieldwork in El Oro in 2006, sex trafficking acquired a heightened level of attention in national, regional, and international public agendas, influencing public perceptions of migrant women engaged in commercial sexual activities as well as formal and informal responses towards this migrant group.

Indeed, national as well as international reports, both governmental and non-governmental, highlighted the criminal aspects behind the experiences of migrant women in the Ecuadorian sex industry. These reports warned about the alarming upsurge of transnational criminal organizations that deceive, coerce, and sexually exploit "womenandchildren" (no differences between them, as the concept coined by Cynthia Enloe critically points out). The increase in human trafficking in Ecuador was explained by the "permeability of borders" and a "lax visa policy" that stimulates "uncontrolled" migration flows.

Although human trafficking is part of the multiple and complex dynamics of transnational migrations, this issue is rarely analyzed within the framework of migration studies. Trafficking is basically studied within criminal or security frameworks. Therefore, migrant women in the sex trade, who are conflated with and portrayed as sex trafficking victims or potential victims are not seen as actors undertaking a cross-border experience; rather, they are depicted as innocent figures who have been deceived and forced to move, vulnerable to sexual exploitation, passive, and childlike. This portrayal reproduces not only traditional ideas about women but also traditional ideas of sexuality as an issue that is connected to violence and multiple disorders.

Moreover, the hypervisibilized image of migrants in the sex industry as victims of evil traffickers has depoliticized the debate about female international migrations and transnational sexual commerce by diverting the attention from the structural causes behind these two issues.[6] Sensationalistic images and discourses about sex trafficking have also justified the adoption of migration and sexual commerce agendas guided by criminalizing approaches, controls, security measures, and exclusionary practices. For instance, in the name of protecting sex trafficking victims and "combating" criminal "mafias" that jeopardize the security of the Ecuadorian state, police raids in brothels and nightclubs increased, as did the "rescue operations" and subsequent deportations of irregular migrant women in the sex trade. Hence, anti-trafficking, anti-migration, and anti-prostitution policies are all connected. I suggested that despite the human rights rhetoric of contemporary anti-trafficking ideologies and practices, measures aimed at "combating" sex trafficking continue to rest on moral concerns about women in prostitution, and they are connected more closely to broader security agendas, like those regarding the "War on Drugs", transnational crime, and "illegal migrations," than to projects promoting social justice and inclusionary forms of citizenship.

In contrast to discourses conflating transnational sexual commerce with sex trafficking, this dissertation underscored the structural inequalities, not only gendered but also class-based and geopolitical, behind female international

migrations and transnational sexual commerce. My work also drew attention to the economic model that sustains the sex industry. In this way, it called into question discourses that individualize the complex topic of female migrations in the sex trade. These discourses tend to explain this phenomenon either by the presence of undesirable individuals/criminals that "force women into prostitution," as mentioned above, or by the "imprudent" decision or "ambitious" attitude of immoral individual women. "Illegal migrations" and "clandestine prostitution" have been analyzed in an identical way, blaming "irresponsible" individuals and diverting attention from the state decisions, including the implementation of restrictive laws, as well as from the social, economic and political conditions that "produce" unauthorized migrants and "clandestine sex workers."

Privileging political economy as the analytical framework, chapter 2 analyzed the economic relations and the global-local connections in which El Oro's sex industry is embedded. As a region traditionally connected to global economic dynamics through the export of primary products, El Oro has experienced important economic growth and a significant development of its commercial, service, and entertainment sectors. Therefore, internal and more recently international migrants, mostly unskilled workers, have moved to El Oro in search of labor opportunities or following labor demand and recruitment processes. This mobile labor force, however, has been affected by an export-oriented economic model that not only increases inequalities and promotes consumerism but also keeps salaries low in order to raise employers' profits and keep export enterprises competitive in the international market. Accordingly, this economic model has influenced both the supply of workers to and the demand for the services of the sex industry.

Similar to the way in which the economic model that sustains the sex industry is rarely examined in studies about transnational sexual commerce, the conditions of labor exploitation that migrants working in this industry face tend to be ignored by social and political actors. Public concerns and human rights work focusing on women in the sex trade concentrate on exploitation as "sexual harm,"

disregarding other forms of exploitation and violence. In contrast, the narratives of Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex sector do not restrict concepts like exploitation and slavery to sexual harm. These concepts are more broadly understood, and they are usually connected to precarious working conditions in different labor sectors (not only in the sex industry but also and principally in domestic work), low wages, hierarchical employer-worker relations, and abuses from migration officials and other state agents.

Consequently, in analyzing the experiences of migrant women in the sex trade, much more work is necessary to understand the connections between sexual and economic relationships—as Bernstein (2007) suggests—and their links with gender, national, and other social hierarchies. Similarly, it is indispensable to critically look at the links between migrants' second class status as "illegal migrants" and sexual "outlaws" and the exploitative labor conditions that afflict them, the effect of which is sometimes far greater than the actions of "criminal mafias."

From sex deviants/slaves to full citizens: towards a human rights-based approach to migration and sexuality

I showed in this dissertation that analyzing the experiences of trans-border migrant women in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations from the dichotomist perspectives of criminality/victimhood, sex work/sex trafficking offers too limited an understanding of the complex realities of this migrant group. Further, I argued that both criminal and protectionist measures are unresponsive to the needs and priorities of working-class women in transnational sexual commerce. The stories of Colombian and Peruvian migrant women in El Oro questioned the effects of "rescue operations" in Ecuadorian sex businesses, which frequently end up in abuses, detentions, and deportations.[7] Instead of asking to be "rescued," my informants emphasized three main concerns and desires that were largely informed by their migration condition. One, they were concerned about access to labor

("any kind," many of them said) with "good payments" (higher than in their origin countries) and in appropriate working conditions; two, many demanded information about visa procedures and migration regulatory processes that would enable them to live and work in Ecuador without having to confront frequent and abusive controls; three, my informants insistently brought up issues of respect and non-discrimination/stigmatization for the type of work they do and for their status as "foreigners" or "illegal migrants."

To change the ways in which migrant women in commercial sexual activities are envisioned in society, as well as the conditions of abuse, violence and discrimination they face as migrants and sexual "Others", I want to consider the importance of using human rights as an analytical framework and a "tool of struggle." However, I share the concerns of feminist academics and activists, and I believe that incorporating female migrations and sexuality into human rights discourse and practice requires attention to the ways in which these sensitive issues—that are connected to citizenship, morality, and, among other things, women's position in society—will be addressed (Miller 2004; Miller and Vance 2004; Kempadoo et al. 2005; Cabezas 2009).

My first concern when addressing the situation of migrant women in the sex trade from a human rights-based approach was that this topic is most often discussed from the angle of sexual violence and many of the proposed measures are very close to patriarchal forms of protection and regulation of female sexuality. According to Allice Miller (2004), adopting the narrow framework of sexual harm in human and women's rights work can inadvertently produce regressive responses. She says:

> The recognition that sexual harm has begun to operate in isolation from other injustices as the worst abuse that can happen to a woman should alert us to the uncomfortable similarities, and differences, between this position and a position we [feminists and human rights advocates] fight against—that the most important thing to know about a woman is her chastity [or sexual integrity in contemporary human rights language] (p. 19).

Miller explains that the sexual harm framework in human rights work reduces women to "suffering bodies in need of protection by the law and the state, rather than as bodies and minds in need not only of protection, but participation and equality" (p. 27). Her analysis resonates with that of Anderson and Andrijasevic (2008) who critically examine the rhetoric of victimhood in relation to female migrants, especially those defined as sex trafficking victims, and make a distinction between passive victims and participating citizens. "Since victims are defined as those who are in need of help (by the state, NGOs, police or clients), they are not seen as political subjects but rather as objects of intervention. Victims cannot engage in the realm of the political. Others need to act on their behalf" (p. 143). Anderson and Andrijasevic, as well as Miller, add that notions of female victimhood and policies focusing exclusively on the protection of women reinforce the idea that one can only engage with citizenship as a formal legal status that is administered by the state and not as a process in which individuals and groups participate in creating the policies affecting their lives.

Thus, to avoid restricting human rights debates and interventions in relation to migrant women in the sex trade within the framework of sexual violence, it is important to consider two issues. First, it is indispensable to look at the intersected forms of violence and injustice that women endure in local, national, and transnational contexts. This includes exploring questions of economic exploitation that have largely been ignored due to the still limited integration of women's rights and economic rights in mainstream human rights movements (Miller 2004). Secondly, it is important to consider issues of oppression and agency and notions of protection and freedom simultaneously. Focusing on only one of these pairs certainly has limitations and risks. I have already mentioned that concentrating exclusively on female migrants in the sex trade as victims produces objects of intervention rather than agents empowered (with more information, more skills to work in better conditions, more rights consciousness, etc.) to avoid or respond to violent or exploitative experiences. But focusing only on agency will ignore the power structures that guide both sexual and migration experiences,

including the power relations that are part of south-south migration processes. Therefore, "a dual approach of protection from harm and creation of the conditions for enjoyment of rights" is necessary (Miller and Vance 2004: 10).

In addition, it is important to consider that although the state has an undeniable role in ensuring human rights and social justice, human rights advocates' fervent but unexamined calls for state intervention, especially legal intervention, pose other problems to human, women's, and migrants' rights work. Several feminist academics studying sexuality have called for a deeper and more critical reflection about the basis on which the state regulates sexuality, especially if we take into account that the state has functioned and continues to function as one of the main sites of control and definition of what is considered "deviant" and thus punishable and excluded in relation to sexual behavior and sexual identities (see for example Araujo 2008). Commercial sex is certainly one of the sexual practices defined by the state as "deviant," "immoral," or "dangerous." Something similar could be said in relation to state intervention regarding international migrations. I showed that even though the state implements laws under the argument of "protecting" and defending the rights of "vulnerable migrant groups," many of these laws and regulations are guided by security approaches and by the stigmatized images many state actors have about migrant populations.

Although understandings of both sexuality and migration have changed significantly around the world over the past few decades, the law is often slow to register these changes, and political will is often too weak to enforce already existing progressive legislation. In Ecuador, for example, the innovative articles that the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution incorporated in relation to migrations and migrants' rights have not been translated into concrete migration laws and regulations[8]; furthermore, these articles of the Constitution have been contradicted by exclusionary policies and practices, such as visa restrictions, detentions, and deportations. All of this is to say that notions of "free movement for people all over the world," "universal citizenship," "the progressive end of the notion of foreigner," and the claim that "no human being should be identified as or

considered illegal due to their migration status" are nice constitutional principles that, unfortunately, have difficulties in their implementation.

Thus, legal responses to human, women's, and migrants' rights are important but not enough. More comprehensive and not exclusively legal measures are required to respond to the needs of migrant women in the sex trade. Moreover, state regulation of transnational migrations and sexual commerce through law, especially through criminal law, can result in punitive measures and abuses of a different sort, especially when these laws target populations that are particularly stigmatized due to the overlapping of their "peripheral sexualities" and their "foreign origin."

But what possibilities for action and rights assertion exist for migrant women that, due to the stigmatized type of work they do and their irregular migration status, do not want to visibilize their presence and thereby become participating actors instead of state objects of protection? Furthermore, if the political concept that has served so many women to organize and fight for their rights, "sex work"/ "sex worker", is avoided or even rejected by migrant women like my informants, what other organizing frameworks can be used for action and rights affirmation? Labor rights and migrants' rights could be broader frames to alert public attention to the conditions of discrimination and exploitation that numerous people, including migrant women in the sex sector, are confronted with in transnational contexts.

In theory, labor rights and migrants' rights could more easily be claimed and achieved in a context of regional and sub-regional integration agreements, as in the case of the Andean sub-region of South America. Here, despite many inconsistencies and limitations,[9] the integration agenda has incorporated migration issues, especially those regarding migrant labor. For example, the Andean Labor Migration Instrument, adopted in 2003 by the Community of Andean Nations, establishes provisions that will permit the movement and temporary residence of Andean nationals in the sub-region as wage workers. In practice, this sub-regional integration instrument has not actually been implemented due to a lack of political

will and the still limited importance given to labor migrations in the integration agenda. Further, authorities of Andean countries have not recognized that if adult sex work is tolerated and regulated in all Andean nations, the people engaged in this labor activity require the protection of their rights, both at national and regional levels, instead of exclusionary provisions guided by moral or public order concerns as is the case with the Andean Labor Migration Instrument. Exclusionary measures do not prevent migrant women from crossing borders and engaging in commercial sexual activities; on the contrary, exclusions and controls drive these women further underground and thus make them more vulnerable to abuses.

But in order to assert their rights as full citizens, migrants require an ample set of actions, one that is not limited to those connected to labor. In this way, the short-term and long-term actions that are required to change social injustices would serve the interests of different women, not only those that identify as "sex workers", as Cabezas (2009) asserts. This author proposes to move to a "new wave" of human rights activism, one that comes from the "expansion of sexual rights." Cabezas and other authors recognize that the concept of "sexual rights" is far from clear and needs further elaboration in human rights instruments and feminist circles. Yet these authors claim that a broader and more comprehensive approach to sexual rights is required, one that does not focus exclusively on a negative or "reactive" response to the oppression and violence suffered by sexual victims.

A more affirmative and emancipatory notion of sexual rights should be guided by a clearly defined set of ethical principles, such as those of sexual diversity (in relation to sexual identities and sexual practices), sexual decision-making autonomy, and gender equality, and it should be complemented by a range of enabling conditions that will transform abstract principles into lived reality (Petchesky 2000). That is to say, an affirmative notion of sexual rights' requires structural changes that will transform the ways in which women and men are envisioned in society while guaranteeing equal access to information—on safer sex and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, for example—, material

resources, and quality services. Within this notion, sexual rights are viewed as interdependent with economic, civil, cultural, and political rights.[10]

If due to the reasons I already explained, some migrant women in the sex trade do not want to become visible and organize to attain rights and change the social injustices they are faced with, human rights NGOs working on issues of migration, women, and sexuality, as well as migrants and sex workers associations could include the demands, concerns, and needs of these migrant women in their agendas. But this would require certain conditions that are not always easy to meet. First of all: a genuine interest in approaching and getting to know the complex realities of migrant women engaged in commercial sexual activities, leaving aside moral approaches and other prejudices.

In Ecuador, non-governmental rights-oriented projects have been directed at either migrants or local sex workers; but virtually none of them have focused on migrant women in the sex industry.[11] As discussed in chapter 3, one of the reasons for this is that some sex workers' organizations consider migrant women in the sex trade as "competition" and "foreigners" with limited rights.

Likewise, human rights NGOs working on migration issues as well as migrant and refugee associations have invisibilized the presence of and thus silenced Colombian and Peruvian women in the Ecuadorian sex trade. At best, this silencing is expressed in representations of this group of migrants as innocent and passive victims that must be rescued, guarded, and spoken for; at worst, it is expressed in the distancing from their "dishonest compatriots" in the sex trade practiced by some Colombian and Peruvian migrants' organizations as a way to change Ecuadorians' negative stereotypes about Colombian and Peruvian migrants and thus facilitate their integration in Ecuador. Both cases are part of what Miller (2004) calls the "operation of respectability in human rights work." This operation, by which human rights advocates attempt to gain credibility and thus influence public agendas on sexuality, and I would add on migration, focuses on alarming but "respectable" topics. For example, human rights advocates might focus on the sexual exploitation of women and children while invisibilizing or distancing

themselves from other issues—less "moderate" and "respectable"—like the rights of women autonomously crossing borders and engaging in the sex trade. In doing so, Miller alerts, advocates are inadvertently using the terminology of human rights to reinforce (rather than reconsider) social and sexual hierarchies.

In sum, incorporating the complex issue of migrant women in commercial sexual activities in human rights work requires a critical and self-reflective position, one that starts by recognizing that human rights doctrine and practice is free from neither geopolitical interests (Cabezas 2009) nor power relations and subordinations based on nationality, class, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality. This position, in which we human rights activists reflect on our own prejudices, ideologies, limitations, and possibilities as we carefully and seriously plan and develop our work, is part of a respectful (rather than "respectable") and relevant human rights work. Being respectful when engaging human rights work also means recognizing the voices, arguments, opinions, and needs of those whom we intend to empower and help attain social justice. This PhD dissertation has attempted to contribute to this by paying particular attention to the multiple voices, ambivalent accounts, concerns, and priorities of migrant women in commercial sex and other intimate-material relations.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] I do not use the terms "prostitution" or "prostitutes" unless they are mentioned as such in popular discourses, legal documents, or academic work due to the limitations these terms present when trying to define the multiple and complex exchanges of sex, eroticism, and material gain, and conscious of their still pejorative connotations. I use other concepts, which are probably more abstract but hopefully more encompassing and less stigmatizing, such as "intimate-economic exchanges" and "erotic transactions." I also use the term "sex work(er)" but to refer to particular sexual encounters and particular groups of women that identify with this political concept.

[2] I do not refer to "immigrants" or "immigration" because these terms are restricted to the standpoint of the "immigrant-receiving" states. I use the term "migrant" independently of migration status or the type of movement women and men engage in (short- or long-term, voluntary or forced); still, I recognize the role of the law in producing different migration categories—the "illegal", for example—and in this way influencing migrants' possibilities in destination countries (see De Genova 2004, 2002; Castles 2007).

[3] For instance, the interesting and politically engaged work of Kempadoo and Doezema (1998) and Kempadoo et al. (2005) visibilizes the role of migration in sex workers' experience but they do not really explore the migration process of migrant women in the sex industry. Further, this literature focuses on "migration for sex work" without really tracing links with broader migration processes.

[4] Some of these studies are cited in the literature review made by Donato et al. 2006.

[5] This scholarship explores the multiple conjunctions between sexuality and migration. My analysis has been especially inspired by the work of Eithne Luibhéid.

[6] For a deeper and critical analysis of the Latin American integration process, see Altmann and Rojas 2008. For an overview of the incorporation of migration issues in the Andean integration agenda, see Araujo and Eguiguren 2009.

[7] Queer migration literature has grown significantly since the mid-1990s. But this literature tends to focus on the experiences of so-called LGTIQ migrants, while leaving unnoticed migrants' non-normative heterosexual experiences, as I will explain further on.

[8] Apart from the work of Sassen on "global cities", see for example Wonders and Michalowski 2001. In this type of work, borders are referred to mainly to talk about movements and flows across nations.

[9] See the critique Andrijasevic (2009) makes on this respect.

[10] INEC, Anuario Entradas y Salidas Internacionales.

[11] The Ecuador–Peru political border is 1529 km. long and it goes across Coastal, Amazonian and Highland provinces. There are six formal border crossing points along this border, and numerous informal or "clandestine" crossing points.

[12] In October 2009, another international bridge, the "Peace Bridge," was inaugurated in the outskirts of Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes, only some kilometers away from the old international bridge that I am referring to.
[13] See for example Peña 2005; Luibhéid and Cantú 2005; Epps et al. 2005.
[14] See Fernández-Dávila, Salazar et al. 2008 for the case of Peru; Piscitelli 2007 for the case of Brazil; Zelizer 2005 for different cases in the United States; Hunter 2002 for South Africa; Kempadoo 2001 for the Caribbean; and Talbot 1989 for the cases of Niger and Kenya.
[15] For the changing views on borders see Paasi 2005 and Grimson 2000a and b.
[16] Migrants' associations, NGOs, and religious institutions comprised this local network, later called "*Red Migración El Oro*," which maintained conversations and negotiations with local authorities.
[17] *Proyecto Comunitario de Prevención de ITS/VIH/SIDA*, coordinated by the local NGO *Fundación Quimera*. With this NGO and different sex workers' organizations, I also collaborated in the formulation and writing of a human rights guide for sex workers; this guide was distributed in brothels and nightclubs of El Oro during my fieldwork.
[18] I am thinking, for instance, of the work of bell hooks, who is challenged to "live theory in a place beyond words" (hooks, 1992: 1).
[19] For instance, together with the leaders of "*Flor de Azalea*," an organization that brings together street-based sex workers, in March 2007 I presented a report on the working and health conditions of sex workers in El Oro to local authorities.
[20] I fully agree with Routledge (1996) that academy cannot be seen as a monolithic institution. Rather, there are different kinds of academies and academics, and different academic practices.

Chapter 1

[1] In the 19th century, the administrative frontiers designated by Spanish Colonial administrators became the international frontiers of the newly independent countries. In a complex geography, though, these political boundaries were not clearly delimited and this provoked multiple tensions as well as armed confrontations between Ecuador and Peru. See St. John 1994.
[2] In the 1990s, Barth revised and refined his earlier work, bringing more nuance to the sharp opposition he had previously presented between boundary construction and cultural content. In this new work, Barth explained that central institutions such as the state are deeply involved in boundary maintenance, both by creating convergence and a shared consciousness within a group, and discontinuities between this group and "outsiders" (Barth 1994).
[3] Gerardo Risco, personal interview, September 2007, Aguas Verdes, Peru.
[4] Angel Jumbo, at the time president of the Huaquillas Chamber of Commerce; personal interview, September 2007, Huaquillas, Ecuador.
[5] Carmen Castro, personal interview, July 2009, Huaquillas, Ecuador.

[6] For a complete version of the peace accord and its treaties, see Acuerdo Amplio Ecuatoriano-Peruano de Integración Fronteriza, Desarrollo y Vecindad, 1999.

[7] For a broader overview of the Andean Community and its integration process, see Arellano 2004.

[8] In 1998, when the Peace Accord between Ecuador and Peru was signed, the total commercial exchange between these two countries was 300 million US dollars. Ten years later, this commercial exchange had increased to 2 billion US dollars. See the Bi-national Plan Ecuador–Peru http://www.planbinacional.gob.ec

[9] Guillermo Russo, personal interview, August 2009, Piura, Peru.

[10] 19th century pro-independence leader, who is usually seen as an icon of Latin American integration.

[11] Un saludo de paz en la frontera, 2009, p. 3.

[12] Gutiérrez dijo que inmigrantes vienen a quitar el trabajo, 2004. One year earlier, an Ecuadorian police chief defined trans-border movements into Ecuador as a "delinquency invasion," while depicting Colombians and Peruvians as "*hampones*" (thugs) and "*maleantes*" (crooks) (Ecuador vive una invasión delincuencial, 2003).

[13] Verdadero conflicto social, 2004.

[14] Between 2003 and 2004, Peruvian migrants were repeatedly accused of "illegality" and defined as "usurpers" of the scarce economic and employment opportunities left in the province. This provoked public protests, especially in the border city of Huaquillas. See for example, Huaquillas: rechazan a los ilegales, 2003.

[15] See for instance the statistics of the Community of Andean Nations in relation to minimum wages in Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia. CAN 2012.

[16] Félix Salazar, personal interview, July 2009, Huaquillas, Ecuador.

[17] Although official statistics do not exist in relation to border trade between Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes, three presidents of the Huaquillas Chamber of Commerce, interviewed in 2007, 2009, and 2011, confirmed that border commerce has decreased between 60 and 80 percent since the year 2000. Their claims were based on their close contact with traders in the zone and their position as traders themselves.

[18] See for example the work of Carlos Larrea (2006) in relation to the dollarization process in Ecuador and its economic and social impacts. National authorities have also confirmed the negative impact of dollarization in the border city of Huaquillas. In 2007 and after analyzing the socio-economic indicators of Huaquillas, the Ecuadorian Coordination Ministry of Social Development decided that the conditions of this border city required the implementation of a Comprehensive Territorial Intervention Program (*Programa de intervención territorial integral*, known as PITI). These programs are implemented in particularly marginalized cities and places affected by economic recession.

[19] Felix Salazar, personal interview, July 2009.

[20] See for example the article in El Universo: Ecuador ante el riesgo de las fronteras abiertas (2003) (Ecuador facing the risk of open borders).

[21] Different opinion polls carried out in the recent reveal the suspicion, stigmatization, and intolerant attitudes Ecuadorians express in relation to migrants from neighboring countries.

See Zepeda and Verdesoto 2011; Advance Consultora quoted in Revista Vistazo 2011; BID-Corpovisionarios-MDMQ 2010.

[22] According to information of the Technical Secretariat for International Cooperation in Ecuador (SETECI), while in the northern Ecuadorian border there were 560 bi-national programs and projects in course in 2011, in the southern border there were only 105 in the same period. Likewise, scholars have given an ample attention to the northern Ecuadorian border as well as to relationships between Ecuador and Colombia through numerous publications, conferences, and public debates. In contrast, Ecuador–Peru relations generated some attention only in 2008, due to the 10th anniversary of the peace accord signed between these two countries.

[23] In fact, ten years after the Ecuador–Peru peace accord (2008), less than 40% of the development projects that were planned for border territories were really implemented; the "peace funds" originally estimated in 3 billion dollars (1.5 for each country) reached only 370 million, including governmental contributions and non-refundable international cooperation funds (Chiriboga 2008).

[24] In relation to social security, for example, only 4% of Huaquillas' workers and 6% of Arenillas' workers are protected by the general public social insurance.

[25] See Decreto Ejecutivo # 254, April 2007.

[26] Radio Génesis, September 21, 2007, Huaquillas.

[27] Comerciantes de Ecuador y Perú bloquearon, 2009; Nuevo puente internacional**,** 2009.

[28] Carlos Gavilánez, journalist, personal interview, 18 September 2007, Huaquillas.

Chapter 2

[1] Although Sassen's work refers to the "trafficking of women," and not to the involvement of migrant women in sexual labor, her political-economic analysis of the sex industry is very useful to understand the connections of this industry to macroeconomic policies and the formal economic sector.

[2] According to official information based on the national census, the population of Machala grew in 380% between 1950 and 1962.

[3] Carlos Larrea (1987) explains that the banana sector reduced its workers from about 90,000 in 1965 to 55,000 in 1976 and then to 36,500 in 1983.

[4] For the case of Ecuador, see for example Korovkin 2004; Jácome et al. 1998; Larrea and North 1997; Moser 1992. For broader analyses of structural adjustment policies, its tensions, and class and gender impacts in developing countries, see Benería 1999.

[5] Until the late 1990s, there was an estimate of 250 shanty towns between Machala and Puerto Bolivar (Cordero et al. 2002). This number has increased in recent years.

[6] According to a 2006 report based on official statistics, agriculture is the sector with the lowest wages in Ecuador. See Secretaría Técnica del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2006.

[7] According to the 2001 National Census, El Oro figured among the five Ecuadorian provinces with the highest percentages of out-migration, especially to Europe.

[8] The number of women offering sexual services is based on information of the El Oro public health centers, where sex workers undergo medical check-ups, and sex workers organizations in the province. Exact information from the whole province is difficult to get due to the decentralization of El Oro's public health centers since 2004, and the still precarious condition of statistical information those centers provide. The number of registered sex business in El Oro is based on information in the 2010 National Economic Census; this information, however, contrasts with reports published at the local level. One of these reports indicates that only in Machala and Puerto Bolivar there were 16 brothels and nightclubs in 2007 (Colectivo Flor de Azalea and Ruiz 2007). These two contrasting figures evidence the still informal nature of sex businesses in small cities of El Oro and other Ecuadorian provinces.

[9] Only in Machala and Puerto Bolivar there were about 90 establishments in 2007, according to the report of Colectivo Flor de Azalea and Ruiz (2007).

[10] Fundación Quimera and OIT-IPEC (2006). See also Cordero et al. 2002. All of these analyses concentrate on the case of child and teenage victims.

[11] There are three main legal systems in relation to prostitution: in a regulationist system states tolerate this activity, and they establish norms and regulations; the abolitionist system aims to remove legal regulations and abolish prostitution; the prohibitionist system criminalizes prostitution while sanctioning sex workers and/or clients.

[12] According to the national census of 1950, 4.5% of the Highlands population and 53.3% of the Coastal population was engaged in civil unions. In the census of 2010, civil unions in Coastal provinces decreased but they were still higher than in the highlands: 28.3% in the Coast and 11.5% in the highlands.

[13] Before 2007, only sex workers in El Oro—organized since the 1980s—underwent medical check-ups once per month. In other provinces, they had check-ups twice and even four times per month.

[14] In April 2014, when I was writing the last draft of this dissertation, a project to reform the Ecuadorian Labor Code was presented to Ecuador's National Assembly. In this project, sex work is visibilized as a type of work.

[15] Curiously, although in popular discourse men's "uncontrolled sexuality" is described as the basis and support of commercial sexual activities, men are exempted from all mechanisms of control.

[16] For the case of Ecuador, see for example the articles in Entretierras, 2008.

[17] Statistics of the El Oro Provincial Health Direction tend to differentiate between three groups of sex workers: those who register and go to their medical check-ups for the first time; those that initiate their sexual activities in the province, and those that are regular sex workers.

[18] While in 1996 there were 10 brothels and 8 barras-bar operating in Puerto Bolivar (Cordero et al. 2002), in 2007 there was 1 brothel and 22 barras-bar (Colectivo Flor de Azalea and Ruiz 2007).

[19] There is, however, a great amount of hearsay in relation to the proliferation of "*chicas pre-pago*" in some Ecuadorian cities and even in neighboring countries like Colombia. In 2013, a soap opera, "*La pre-pago*," was broadcast on Ecuadorian national television.

[20] This information is based on my personal and professional contact with Colectivo Flor de Azalea, a sex workers' organization, and the local NGO Fundación Quimera, which assists female teenagers affected by sexual trafficking.

Chapter 3

[1] Some authors have emphasized the commonalities between migrant women in the sex trade and other female migrant groups. Still, these commonalities are largely ignored. See for example the work of Oso (2003), who studies the migration strategies of Colombian and Ecuadorian women involved in domestic and sex work in Spain.

[2] In Latin America, women represent 50.5% of all international migrants, while worldwide the participation of women in international migrations is 48.8% (Cerrutti 2009).

[3] In contrast to the ample body of literature regarding Ecuadorians' migration to northern countries, there are still few studies about Colombians' and Peruvians' migrations into Ecuador. Moreover, most of these latter studies refer to Colombian refugees, while only some reports concern Peruvian migrants in Ecuador. See for example Ramos (2010).

[4] My information about the socioeconomic situation of northern Peru is also based on personal interviews with analysts in the area. For instance, Miguel Abramonte, from the *Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado* (CIPCA), August 2009, Piura.

[5] The E.U. imposed tourist visas to Colombians in 2002, to Ecuadorians in 2003, and to Bolivians in 2007. Peruvians have confronted this restriction since 1992. However, in 2014, in the midst of the economic crisis affecting many European countries, the E.U. decided to lift its tourist visa requirement to Peruvians and Colombians due to "close [commercial] relationships" with Colombia and Peru. When this measure comes in place, probably at the end of 2014, it would be important to investigate its effects on migration flows from these two countries into the E.U.

[6] The interesting book edited by Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), which focuses on "nannies, maids and sex workers" in the global economy, for example, includes 11 articles related to domestic and care work, out of 14 that analyze particular migration experiences of "third world women in affluent countries."

[7] Ecuador es el sueño de los hermanos del Sur, 2006.

[8] The Canadian government, for example, has a visa program for "exotic dancers" (Díaz Barrero 2005). Something similar occurs in Switzerland with the short-term "dancer's permit" (Dahinden 2010).

[9] Several authors have acknowledged the role of imagination in promoting or constraining mobility. Images, meanings, and values associated to certain places and people are an example of this process. See Mahler and Pessar (2006).

[10] Other women I interviewed moved less, especially the few ones that had relatives in Ecuador. Migrants in barras-bar are also less mobile, although they move from one business to another, looking for better working conditions.

[11] Stories about same-sex desire and same-sex relationships inside the sex industry are not rare. My informants commented about "lesbians" in sex businesses, while other people in the field shared stories about female employers attracted by their female workers.
[12] Radio program "*Callos y guatitas*," Radio Católica, November 18th, 2007, Quito.
[13] Piedad, just like Katty, was excluded from the Spanish airport. Two other migrants I interviewed were deported from Spain due to an irregular migration status.

Chapter 4

[1] Although Andean citizens do not require a tourist visa to enter Ecuador, the three-month-stay permit they receive with the "Andean Migration Card" applies exclusively to tourism, not to work.
[2] Invasión extranjera en prostíbulos (2003); Invasión de colombianas en prostíbulos (2003).
[3] Invasión extranjera (2003: 19).
[4] For example, NGOs working on migration issues have questioned the criminalization of migrant populations by highlighting that official police statistics show a very low percentage of foreigners detained in Ecuadorian prisons (CODHES 2011; INREDH 2004 quoted in Coalición 2007). In the capital, Quito, some statistics show that there is no direct correlation between sex businesses and rates of crime (Allan 2009).
[5] This information is based on my personal conversations with different organized sex workers in Machala and other cities of El Oro.
[6] On the production of migrants' illegality, see De Genova 2002, Luibhéid 2008.
[7] The United Nations Human Trafficking Protocol contains a contemporary definition of trafficking that has been incorporated into various national legislations. See article 1 of the Protocol.
[8] On March 8, 2008, a political party in Quito invited me to give a talk about trafficking to its women members. The event opened with a dramatic movie about a Russian woman sexually enslaved in the United States, where she finally died.
[9] The interesting article of Andrijasevic (2007) argues that the frequent display of naked and sexualized female bodies in anti-trafficking campaigns reveals an eroticized and voyeuristic spectacle of these bodies.
[10] See for example, Alerta por la trata de mujeres en la frontera (2008).
[11] See Trata de personas y pornografía (2006).
[12] Exceptions exist though. In Machala, the local NGO Fundación Quimera has supported the rights of adult sex workers while at the same time working on prevention and protection projects for children and teenage sex trafficking victims. Thus, distinctions are made between sex work and sex trafficking and heterogeneity is recognized in the experiences of adults and under age persons in the sex trade.
[13] Carlos Valdez, Asociación de Migrantes Peruanos "Señor de los Milagros," quoted in Coalición 2007: 122.
[14] Popular discourses about human trafficking tend to conflate the commercial sexual exploitation of underage persons with trafficking. The latter is a problem that affects both

underage and adult persons and, as I already mentioned, includes other forms of exploitation and not only sexual exploitation.

[15] At the national level, the National Attorney Office registered 365 reports of trafficking in the same period, which means an average of 75 cases per year.

[16] See for example Ecuador emerges as hub for international crime (2010).

[17] A study of the International Labour Organization (ILO) published in 2002 was probably the first one raising the alarm about sex trafficking in Ecuador. Curiously, ILO's study refers to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and not to human trafficking (see Sandoval 2002); still, its results have been cited by national and international reports on trafficking, including the U.S. 2004 TIP report.

[18] Right after its 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report, the U.S. government threatened to impose economic sanctions if Ecuador did not implement a relevant anti-trafficking policy (see EEUU amenaza, 2004; El gobierno cumple con exigencia, 2004).

[19] See, Gobierno de los Estados Unidos ha Contribuido con Más de 93 Millones de Dólares a la Lucha Contra el Narcotráfico y la Trata de Personas, 2007.

[20] See the discussions of Kempadoo (2005) and Sha (2008) on the "war against trafficking" and the role of the U.S. government in introducing this "war" in developing regions that are of their strategic interest.

[21] Ley de Migración, 1971, article 9, No. XII. "Sexual deviation" was also part of the exclusionary provisions that were abolished in 2005.

[22] See Ministerio de Trabajo de Ecuador, s/d. "Política de Inmigración Laboral."

[23] Gobierno ecuatoriano confirma que pedirá récord policial a colombianos. 2004.

[24] Canciller Ecuador pide mejorar control migratorio Perú y Colombia. 2004.

[25] See Coalición 2007; Jockisch 2007; Mayaute 2005.

[26] A first regularization program directed at Colombian citizens took place between November 2004 and February 2005. A second one, for Peruvians, took place from December 2006 until May 2007; this program was extended several times until it acquired permanent status.

[27] Abraham and Van Schendel (2006) have a very interesting discussion about the differences and connections between notions of legality/illegality and licitness/illicitness, which are valid to analyze commercial sexual activities in the Ecuadorian context.

[28] Of 35 Colombian and Peruvian women I interviewed between 2006 and 2007, only five had a regular migration status. Except for one of them (who moved to domestic service and then applied to the Ecuador–Peru regularization program), all of these legal residents had a "support" or family reunification visa. Statistics on migrants' regularizations indicate that 30% of Colombians and Peruvians in Ecuador have acquired legal residence through this type of visa. See Coalición 2007.

[29] As Gayle Rubins explains, a sexual hierarchy is like a class system in which different sexual practices, identities and communities are ranked, "from the most normative and socially approved to the most stigmatized and despised" (in Miller and Vance 2004: 6, 7). Its practical value lies in the way it exposes the social and cultural rules for evaluating "legitimate" and "illegitimate" sexualities, and thus deserving of rights or not.

[30] Reglamento a la Ley de Extranjería (1986), Art. 35, No. VI.

[31] The creation of the National Secretary for Migrants (*Secretaría Nacional del Migrante*, SENAMI) is part of the Ecuadorian government's effort to include migration in its public agenda.
[32] See SENAMI, Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Humano para las Migraciones 2007-2011.
[33] Declarations of the government minister, Gustavo Larrea, in December 2008, cited in Nasimba 2010: 205.
[34] According to the Ecuadorian Migration Law, hotels, hostels, and other lodgings hosting foreign people are obliged to send daily reports to the migration police service, including the foreigners' complete names and dates of entry and departure. Reglamento a la Ley de Migración (1971), article 32.
[35] To complement the aforementioned controls, in November 2008, the migration control post of Huaquillas put in place biometric fingerprint scanning. These controls were applied exclusively to Colombian and Peruvian citizens, although local authorities asserted that they planned on expanding them to all foreigners entering Ecuador. The aim was to check border crossers' criminal record and prevent the use of false documentation (see El Oro: El control digital se prueba. 2008). In early 2009, however, biometric controls disappeared suddenly and without explanation.
[36] See Detenidas prostitutas e ilegales, 2006; "Cosecha" de mujeres en barras, 2008; Batida a indocumentadas, 2009*;* Peruanas fueron detenidas, 2010; Peruanas detenidas, 2010.
[37] Personal interview, April 2006, Machala.
[38] See Decreto Ejecutivo # 1981, 2004.
[39] Cheap, working-class brothels.

Chapter 5

[1] Constable (2009) mentions different recent academic works supporting this argument.
[2] Personal interview, January 2008, Quito.

Chapter 6

[1] El mercado del placer, s/d. Diario HOY. Translation fromSpanish is mine.
[2] The work of Cabezas (2009) and Piscitelli (2007), focused on the intimate relationships both inside and outside the sex industry, is an exception to this tendency.
[3] These "market strategies" used by brothel owners to maintain demand in their businesses contrast with the constant increases in the price of renting rooms in these same brothels, something that negatively impacts on sex workers' economic situation.
[4] Only in 2008 were some regulations introduced in barras-bar, among them opening hours and the obligation to close on Sundays.
[5] Scholars studying homosexual relationships that mix sexuality and material gain have also preferred to avoid concepts like prostitution. Instead, they have used categories like "compensated sex" to refer to relationships that mix leisure, sexual exploration, and material interest or consumption practices among young men. See for example Fernández-Dávila et al. 2008.

[6] On this point, see for example Sanders (2005), who explains that one of the "golden rules" in the sex trade is not getting emotionally involved with men originally met as paying customers. However, sex workers often break this rule, as I have tried to show in the first section of this chapter.
[7] Inter-ministerial agreement between the ministries of Foreign Relations, Commerce and Integration, and Interior, Police, and Cults. March 25, 2010, quoted in Defensoría del Pueblo de Ecuador 2010, p. 19.

Conclusions

[1] Existing studies are largely concentrated on the Southern Cone, and more specifically on the border territories of Argentina.
[2] See for example CEDLA 2000, which refers to a "borderless Latin America."
[3] In a CAN summit in 2008, the Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa proposed the consolidation of an "Andean citizenship" as a "new axis of integration." Correa stressed that the great challenge for the Community of Andean Nations is to create a space for the exercise of new rights, freedoms, and guarantees additional to those recognized by individual states. See, Presidente Correa propone construcción de la ciudadanía andina como nuevo eje de la Integración, 2008.
[4] See for example Carrión and Espín (2011), the articles in the bulletins Fronteras 2010a and 2010b, and Ciudad Segura 2006.
[5] See for example Delacoste and Alexander 1987, and Kempadoo and Doezema 1998, for the case of sex workers.
[6] Anderson and Andrijasevic 2008 in a very interesting analysis about the depolitization of the migration debate explain it through the "moral panic over trafficking."
[7] In April 2014, Ecuadorian authorities informed about the dismantling of an international trafficking organization, and the "rescue" of 72 women, many of them Cuban migrants, by Ecuadorian police agents (see La Policía Nacional desarticula banda de trata de personas, 2014). Some days after this "rescue operation," I participated in a public debate on sex work and trafficking in which organized Ecuadorian sex workers complained about abuses during the mentioned police raid. They said that 150 women in total, both Ecuadorians and women from other nationalities, were detained and subjected to anti-narcotic urine testing. Ecuadorians were detained for lacking the health card that allows them to legally work in sex businesses, while migrants were detained for lacking working permits.
[8] Today, Ecuador has and still uses its 1971 Migration law, which is strongly guided by the notion of "national security," as explained in chapter 4.
[9] I have explained throughout this PhD thesis that integration agreements in the Andean sub-region are focused, for the most part, on "free movement" across borders, and this does not necessarily imply "free long-term residency" or "free access to labor rights."
[10] For a broader discussion on sexual rights see Corrêa, Petchesky, and Parker 2008.
[11] An exception to this was a project that sex workers' and other women's organizations in Machala implemented in 2005: "*Proyecto Migración e Industria del Sexo*."

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SUMMARY IN DUTCH – SAMENVATTING IN HET NEDERLANDS

LICHAMEN, GRENZEN EN BEGRENZINGEN: EROTISCHE TRANSACTIES EN INTRAREGIONALE MIGRATIES IN ECUADOR

Dit onderzoek verbindt literatuur over migratie, seksualiteit en grenzen teneinde de ervaringen, de maatschappelijke en de zelf-representaties te bestuderen van de Peruaanse en Colombiaanse migranten die verwikkeld zijn in verschillende relaties waarin seks, erotiek, geld en andere vormen van materiële uitwisseling worden gecombineerd. Het onderzoek heeft plaatsgevonden in de provincie *El Oro* aan de Ecuatoriaanse zuidkust, aan de grens met Peru. Om de ervaringen van de vrouwen op een bredere manier te kunnen bestuderen ben ik hen tegemoet getreden als migranten in plaats van als "sekswerksters". Mijn argument is daarbij dat het perspectief van migratiestudies het mogelijk maakt verschillende aspecten van hun leven als migranten te bestuderen, zonder hun ervaringen te beperken tot die op het terrein van hun seksuele contacten en praktijken. Tegelijkertijd erken ik wel dat seksualiteit een specifieke dimensie toevoegt en invloed heeft op verschillende aspecten van die ervaringen rondom migratie, zoals de motivatie om te migreren, de mogelijkheden om werk te vinden in gesegmenteerde en geseksualiseerde arbeidsmarkten en de strategieën die migranten gebruiken om hun migratie-ambities te bereiken.

De studies over transnationale migraties en de seksindustrie zijn vooral gericht op zuid-noordstromen en op de vraag naar vrouwen van de zogenoemde "Derde Wereld" door mannen van de "Eerste Wereld", met alle verschillen, hiërarchieën en ongelijkheden van klasse, etniciteit, ras en geopolitieke relaties die daarmee samenhangen. Deze studie, echter, gaat over zuid-zuidstromen binnen eenzelfde regio –de Andes subregio van Zuid Amerika– waar het gaat om vrouwen en mannen die niet alleen geografisch maar ook in termen van klasse, etniciteit en ras dicht bij elkaar staan. Het doel is de specificiteit van de zuid-zuidmigratie te verhelderen alsmede de manieren waarop processen van erotisering/ seksualisering,

patronen van verlangens, verscheidenheid en ongelijkheid vorm krijgen binnen migratiecontexten die zowel geografisch als cultureel en politiek dichtbij elkaar staan. Door de analyse te concentreren op een specifieke grensregio, zal deze studie niet alleen grenzen kunnen begrijpen als metaforische beelden of lijnen die opdelen en die "overal zijn", maar grenzen ook kunnen bezien als gebieden die historisch zo gevormd zijn en politiek-juridische scheidslijnen zijn, hetgeen consequenties heeft voor concrete zaken in het leven van migranten. De *El Oro* provincie is een geschikt gebied om deze processen te bestuderen en een bijdrage te leveren aan grensstudies met een minder abstracte en algemene analyse.

Na het langdurige grensconflict tussen Ecuador en Peru, dat in 1998 eindigde met het ondertekenen door de respectievelijke regeringen van de vredesakkoorden, werd de grens tussen de Ecuatoriaanse provincie *El Oro* en het Peruaanse departement Tumbes permanent opengesteld. De sociale en economische relaties, en de vrije circulatie van mensen binnen deze regio werden geformaliseerd en geïntensiveerd als gevolg van integratieovereenkomsten. Er waren ook nog andere factoren die van invloed waren op de komst van migrantiearbeid(st)ers naar *El Oro*, niet alleen vanuit Peru, maar ook vanuit Colombia. Genoemd kunnen worden de dollarisering van de Ecuatoriaanse economie in 2000 en de gestaag groeiende commerciële dynamiek in *El Oro*, gebaseerd op de export van grondstoffen. *El Oro* heeft daarnaast ook een belangrijke seksindustrie die alternatieve vormen van werk en inkomen biedt aan ongekwalificeerde arbeiders en arbeidsters (vrouwen die seksuele diensten aanbieden of voedsel verkopen; mannen die als bewaker, ober, taxichauffeur etc. werken). Deze groep is uitgesloten van het economisch model gericht op de internationale markten.

Mijn werk laat zien dat in een context waar steeds meer migranten van buurlanden naar grens-nabije steden komen, de Peruaanse en Colombiaanse vrouwen in de seks-industrie op een specifieke manier zichtbaar worden in de discoursen van de grensbevolking. Hun aanwezigheid brengt een serie van typische denkbeelden met zich mee, het versterkt stereotypen en geeft evenzozeer

aanleiding tot verlangens als dat het angst doet toenemen ten aanzien van diegenen die in de gangbare taal "broeders" worden genoemd –vanwege de culturele en historische nabijheid van Ecuador met Peru en Colombia–, maar in de praktijk als "anders" en "vreemdeling" worden gezien. Peruanen en Colombianen in het algemeen en migranten in de seksindustrie in het bijzonder worden in *El Oro* zelfs geassocieerd met allerlei sociale problemen die, zo wordt verondersteld, veroorzaakt worden door een "overdreven" en "onverantwoordelijke" opening van de grenzen.

Daarom stelt dit proefschrift dat de lichamelijke aanwezigheid van de Peruaanse en Colombiaanse migranten in de seksindustrie van *El Oro*, waarbij deze gezien worden als beschikbaar, dienstbaar, en uitermate kwetsbaar voor seksuele uitbuiting, op symbolische wijze verbonden zijn met samenlevingen met open grenzen die ontvankelijk zijn voor de "penetratie", de "invasie" en de "besmetting". Dat wil zeggen, de accentuering van de verschillen, de scheiding, de hiërarchieën, en als gevolg daarvan de controles, beperkingen en uitsluitingen die deze specifieke groep van grensoverschrijdende migranten over zich afroept, zijn eerder beïnvloed door met elkaar verbonden denkbeelden over seksualiteit en nationaliteit –of de door mij genoemde seksuele stigmatisering met een nationale oorsprong –, dan door ras of klasse, zoals studies over zuid-noord migraties vaak benadrukken.

Het onderzoek dat ik hier presenteer is gebaseerd op een etnografische studie, uitgevoerd gedurende twee jaar in verschillende steden van *El Oro*: Machala, Puerto Bolivar en Huaquillas. Het veldwerk omvatte diepte-interviews met vrouwen uit Peru en Colombia die gekozen hadden voor tijdelijke, roulerende of permanente migratie naar Ecuador, en uit het vergezellen van hen op de werkplek en daarbuiten. Daarnaast heeft er participatieve observatie plaatsgevonden in bordelen, nachtclubs en bars van El Oro, waar cliënten, eigenaren en beheerders van deze zaken werden geïnterviewd. Lokale autoriteiten en grensbewoners van vooral de Ecuatoriaanse kant, maar ook uit steden in het noorden van Peru, zijn eveneens geïnterviewd.

Overtuigd van het feit dat methodologie en inhoud onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden zijn en dat de productie van kennis niet los staat van machtsrelaties, wordt mijn werk gekarakteriseerd door een kritische en zelfkritische reflectie op de relatie onderzoekster – onderzochten, op de analyse, de interpretatie en het academische schrijven. Vanuit deze reflectieve positie erken ik de theoretische potentie van de geschiedenissen en ervaringen van de migrantenvrouwen, wier stem, argumenten en zelfpercepties nuances, ambivalenties en complexiteiten laten zien die niet altijd in ogenschouw worden genomen in gangbare discoursen en zelfs niet in academische studies over migranten die in commerciële seksuele relaties zijn verwikkeld. Verschillende van deze studies hebben zich laten leiden door denkbeelden en analytische categorieën die te beperkt zijn om complexe intieme en seksuele relaties te kunnen verklaren.

De resultaten van dit onderzoek laten daadwerkelijk zien dat denkbeelden, zoals "seksslavernij" en "sekswerk" te beperkt zijn om de complexe en diverse ervaringen te analyseren van Peruaanse en Colombiaanse migranten, die betrokken zijn in een variëteit van relaties die intimiteit en materialiteit combineren.

Aan de ene kant neigen de discoursen over slavernij en "seksuele vrouwenhandel", die veel aandacht hebben gekregen op lokaal, nationaal en internationaal niveau, er naar om alle ervaringen van de migranten in de seksindustrie als onveranderlijk onderdrukkend, gewelddadig en als het bijna uitsluitende resultaat van "criminele transnationale maffia's" te presenteren. Als gevolg daarvan reproduceren ze traditionele beelden van vrouwen als zijnde fragiel, kwetsbaar, bijna kinderlijk en derhalve niet in staat beslissingen te nemen en risico's te taxeren. Sterker nog, deze studie laat zien dat de alarmistische en sensationalistische discoursen over seksuele vrouwenhandel van migranten leiden tot een restrictief migratiebeleid, tot misbruik-makende grenscontroles, en tot beschermende en paternalistische acties. Daarom is mijn argument dat onder de discoursen en acties ten aanzien van seksuele vrouwenhandel vaak bredere agenda's schuil gaan gericht op de controle van migratie en de vrouwelijke seksualiteit.

Hoewel het anderzijds dankzij het concept van "sekswerker" gelukt is de debatten over de seksindustrie en de personen die hierin werken te verschuiven van het morele naar het veld van werk en rechten, weerspiegelt dit nog steeds niet de grote variëteit van intiem-materiële relaties waarin veel vrouwen uit marginale sectoren betrokken zijn teneinde toegang te hebben tot inkomen, steun te kunnen bieden aan hun familie en hun levensomstandigheden te kunnen verbeteren. "Sekswerk" betreft dus een belangrijk politiek concept dat diende om te strijden tegen de stigmatisering, het geweld en de discriminatie waar personen die werken in de seksindustrie mee te maken krijgen, maar dat niet volstaat om alle relaties die seks, erotiek, geld en andere vormen van materiële uitwisseling met elkaar verbinden te omvatten, vooral wanneer deze relaties plaatsvinden buiten de werksituatie. Verschillende van mijn informanten hebben intieme relaties met ex-cliënten, vrienden en bekenden. Deze relaties die vriendschap, gezelschap, seks en soms romantiek verbinden met cadeaus en economische steun worden door de betrokkenen niet als sekswerk gekwalificeerd. Ze worden eerder gezien als onderdeel van het bredere palet van ontmoetingen en contacten die dagelijks plaatsvinden en die zich niet beperken tot seksuele relaties.

Samenvattend, in dit proefschrift worden de ervaringen bestudeerd van migrantenvrouwen die verwikkeld zijn in intiem-materiële relaties die verder gaan dan de conceptuele dichotomieën, zoals slachtoffer – actor, kwetsbaar – crimineel, of seksslaaf – sekswerker. Ik suggereer veeleer dat deze ervaringen de grenzen tussen het intieme en het commerciële, tussen de "authentieke liefdesrelaties" en die relaties die gedefinieerd worden als voortkomend uit "eigenbelang" en als puur seksueel, doen vervagen. De bestudereing van deze complexe relaties, bezien vanuit de context van migratie, maken het mogelijk de capaciteit van de vrouwen om zelf antwoord te geven op processen van uitsluiting en marginalisering, zichtbaar te maken. De processen van uitsluiting en marginalisering komen daarbij voort uit globaliserings- en regionaliseringsprocessen, en genereren de obstakels die veel migranten ontmoeten binnen hun ervaringen op het terrein van transnationale migratie.

De grensoverschrijdende bewegingen en de ervaringen van Peruaanse en Colombiaanse vrouwen in de provincie *El Oro* laten eveneens de beperkingen en contradicties zien van regionale en sub-regionale integratieprocessen. De grensoverschrijdende en intra-regionale bewegingen zijn bejubeld als een uiting van eenheid en verbinding tussen "broedervolken", maar tegelijkertijd zijn ze onderhevig aan een serie restricties vanwege specifieke belangenbehartigingen of de "nationale veiligheid", alle verbonden met de sociale klasse, de nationaliteit of de seksualiteit van de migranten, en met de angsten voor diegenen die "gevaarlijk dichtbij" staan.

SUMMARY IN SPANISH – RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

CUERPOS, FRONTERAS Y LÍMITES: TRANSACCIONES ERÓTICAS Y MIGRACIONES INTRA-REGIONALES EN ECUADOR

Esta investigación integra la literatura sobre migración, sexualidad y fronteras para estudiar las experiencias, representaciones sociales y auto-representaciones de las migrantes peruanas y colombianas envueltas en diferentes relaciones que combinan sexo, erotismo, dinero y otras formas de intercambio material, en la provincia de El Oro, costa sur de Ecuador y frontera con Perú. Con el fin de mirar de manera más integral las experiencias de estas mujeres, me aproximo a ellas como migrantes antes que como "trabajadoras del sexo". En este sentido, argumento que el marco de los estudios migratorios permite mirar diferentes aspectos de la vida de estas migrantes, como sus motivaciones para migrar, sus oportunidades de empleo en mercados laborales segmentados, sus relaciones familiares transnacionales y las estrategias que ellas utilizan para alcanzar sus proyectos migratorios; por tanto, no restrinjo las experiencias migratorias de estas mujeres a sus encuentros y prácticas sexuales. Al mismo tiempo reconozco que la sexualidad añade una dimensión particular e influencia de manera especial las experiencias de este grupo de migrantes.

Desde este marco de análisis invierto las discusiones sobre las migrantes en la industria del sexo, que tienden a ver a estas mujeres como trabajadoras sexuales que se mueven a través de las fronteras. Mi trabajo en cambio se enfoca en mujeres migrantes que, como parte de sus experiencias migratorias, se involucran en diferentes relaciones íntimas-materiales, una de las cuales es el trabajo sexual.

Los estudios sobre las migraciones transnacionales y la industria del sexo global se han concentrado en gran medida en los movimientos sur-norte y la demanda de mujeres del llamado "tercer mundo" por parte de hombres del "primer mundo", con todas las diferencias, jerarquías e inequidades que esto implica en

cuanto a clase, etnicidad, raza y relaciones geopolíticas. En cambio, este trabajo se concentra en movimientos sur-sur y dentro de una misma región –la subregión Andina de América del Sur- que involucra a mujeres y hombres que no solo están cerca geográficamente sino también en términos de clase, etnicidad y raza. Mi objetivo ha sido explicar las particularidades de la migración sur-sur y las maneras en que los procesos de erotización/sexualización, patrones de deseo, diferenciación e inequidad toman forma en contextos migratorios cercanos, tanto geográfica, como cultural y políticamente. Así mismo, al concentrar el análisis en una región fronteriza específica, este estudio propone reflexionar sobre las fronteras no solo como imágenes metafóricas o líneas divisorias que se extienden y hoy "están en todas partes", sino también como territorios localizados e históricamente situados, y divisiones político-jurídicas que tienen consecuencias materiales concretas en la vida de las personas migrantes. La provincia de El Oro es un sitio privilegiado para estudiar estos procesos y aportar a los estudios fronterizos con análisis menos abstractos y generalizadores.

Después del largo conflicto territorial entre Ecuador y Perú, que terminó en 1998, los acuerdos de paz firmados entre los gobiernos de estos dos países incluyeron la apertura permanente del paso fronterizo entre la provincia ecuatoriana de El Oro y el departamento peruano de Tumbes. Las relaciones sociales y económicas, así como la circulación de personas en esta región sin duda se formalizaron e intensificaron como consecuencia de convenios de integración. Otros factores también motivaron la llegada de trabajadore/as migrantes hacia El Oro, no solo desde Perú sino también desde Colombia. Entre estos factores está la dolarización de la economía ecuatoriana, en el año 2000, y la sostenida dinámica comercial de El Oro, basada en la exportación de bienes primarios. Además, en El Oro existe una importante industria del sexo que ofrece alternativas laborales y fuentes de ingreso a trabajadoras y trabajadores no calificados (mujeres que ofrecen servicios sexuales o trabajan en venta de comida; hombres que trabajan como guardias de seguridad, meseros, taxistas, etc.) que han sido excluidos de un modelo económico volcado hacia los mercados internacionales.

Mi trabajo muestra que en el contexto de una creciente llegada de migrantes de países vecinos a ciudades orenses, las mujeres peruanas y colombianas en el sector del comercio sexual son especialmente visibilizadas en los discursos de las poblaciones fronterizas. Su presencia genera una serie de imaginarios, refuerza estereotipos y, de manera simultánea, motiva deseos y acrecienta los miedos hacia quienes en el discurso público son llamados "hermanos" -por la cercanía cultural e histórica que Ecuador tiene con Perú y Colombia- pero en la práctica son vistos como diferentes y "extranjeros". Más aún, peruano/as y colombiano/as en El Oro, de manera general, y las migrantes en el comercio sexual de manera particular, son asociado/as con diferentes problemas sociales que son supuestamente causados por una "exagerada" o "irresponsable" apertura de fronteras.

En tal sentido, esta tesis sostiene que los cuerpos de las migrantes peruanas y colombianas en la industria del sexo de El Oro, vistos como abiertos, ofrecidos o especialmente vulnerables a la explotación sexual, son conectados simbólicamente con sociedades de fronteras abiertas que son susceptibles a la "penetración", la "invasión", y la "contaminación". Es decir, la acentuación de diferencias, divisiones, jerarquías y, como consecuencia, los controles, restricciones y exclusiones que provoca este específico grupo de migrantes trans-fronterizas están influenciados por nociones interconectadas de sexualidad y nacionalidad, o lo que he llamado la estigmatización sexual del origen nacional, antes que por raza y clase como resaltan los estudios sobre las migraciones sur-norte.

La investigación que presento se basa en un estudio de carácter etnográfico que se extendió por dos años y se concentró en varias ciudades de El Oro, principalmente Machala, Puerto Bolívar y Huaquillas. El trabajo de campo incluyó entrevistas a profundidad con mujeres que optaron por movimientos migratorios temporales, circulares o más permanentes desde Perú y Colombia hacia Ecuador; además se acompañó a estas mujeres en sus espacios laborales y no laborales. También se realizó observación participativa en burdeles, nightclubs y barras-bar de El Oro, donde se entrevistó a clientes, dueño/as y administradores de estos

negocios. Autoridades locales y poblaciones fronterizas, sobre todo en el lado ecuatoriano pero también en ciudades del norte de Perú, fueron entrevistadas.

Convencida de que metodología y contenido son inseparables (Rosaldo 2000) y que la producción de conocimiento no está exenta de relaciones de poder, mi trabajo ha seguido una reflexión crítica y auto-crítica sobre la relación investigadora/sujetos investigados, el análisis, la interpretación y la escritura académica. Desde esta posición reflexiva, reconozco el potencial teórico de las historias y experiencias de las mujeres migrantes, cuyas voces, argumentos y autopercepciones introducen matices, ambivalencias y complejidades que no siempre son tomadas en cuenta en discursos populares y ni siquiera en estudios académicos sobre las migrantes involucradas en relaciones sexuales-comerciales. Varios de estos estudios están guiados por nociones y categorías analíticas que tienen limitaciones para explicar complejas relaciones íntimas y sexuales.

En efecto, los resultados de esta investigación indican que nociones como "esclavitud sexual" y "trabajo sexual" resultan limitadas para analizar las experiencias complejas y diversas de las migrantes peruanas y colombianas envueltas en una variedad de relaciones que combinan intimidad y materialidad.

Por un lado, los discursos sobre esclavitud o "trata sexual de mujeres", que tanta atención ha generado a nivel local, nacional e internacional, tienden a presentar todas las experiencias de las migrantes en el comercio sexual como homogéneamente opresivas, violentas y resultado casi exclusivo de "mafias criminales transnacionales". En consecuencia, reproducen imágenes tradicionales de las mujeres como frágiles, vulnerables, casi infantiles y, por ende, incapaces de tomar decisiones y asumir riesgos. Más aún, este trabajo muestra que los discursos alarmistas y sensacionalistas sobre la trata sexual de mujeres migrantes justifican políticas migratorias restrictivas, controles fronterizos abusivos y acciones con enfoques proteccionistas y paternalistas. Por ello, he argumentado que en los discursos y acciones frente a la trata sexual de mujeres muchas veces se esconden agendas más amplias para controlar las migraciones y la sexualidad femenina.

Por otro lado, aunque el concepto de "trabajo sexual" reconoce la heterogeneidad de la industria del sexo y ha logrado mover los debates sobre las personas en el comercio sexual del campo de la moralidad al campo del trabajo y los derechos, todavía no refleja la amplia variedad de relaciones íntimas-materiales en las que muchas mujeres de sectores marginados se involucran para acceder a recursos económicos, apoyar a su familia y mejorar su situación de vida. Se trata, entonces, de un concepto político importante pues ha servido para luchar contra la estigmatización, la violencia y la discriminación que afecta a las personas que trabajan en la industria del sexo, pero que resulta inadecuado para referirse a todas las relaciones que combinan sexo, erotismo, dinero y otras formas de intercambio material, especialmente cuando estas relaciones tienen lugar fuera del ámbito laboral. Varias de mis informantes se involucraron en relaciones íntimas con ex clientes, amigos y conocidos. Estas relaciones que combinan amistad, acompañamiento, sexo y a veces romance, con regalos y apoyo económico, no son calificadas por sus protagonistas como "trabajo sexual", sino que son vistas como parte de encuentros y contactos más amplios que tienen lugar en el día a día y no se restringen a relaciones de carácter sexual.

En resumen, esta tesis propone estudiar las experiencias de las mujeres migrantes envueltas en relaciones íntimas-materiales más allá de conceptos dicotómicos como víctima-agente, vulnerable-criminal, esclava sexual-trabajadora sexual, y más bien sugiere que estas experiencias confunden las fronteras entre lo íntimo y lo comercial, las relaciones "auténticamente amorosas" y aquellas que son definidas como "interesadas" y puramente sexuales. Mirar estas complejas relaciones desde el marco de las migraciones permite visibilizar la capacidad de las mujeres para responder a contextos de exclusión y marginación que se dan como parte de los procesos de globalización y regionalización, incluidas las barreras que muchas migrantes enfrentan en sus experiencias de migración transnacional.

Así mismo, los movimientos transfronterizos y experiencias de las mujeres peruanas y colombianas en la provincia de El Oro exponen las limitaciones y contradicciones de los procesos de integración regional y sub-regional. En efecto,

los movimientos transfronterizos e intra-regionales son celebrados como una manifestación de unión y conexión entre "pueblos hermanos". Pero al mismo tiempo estos movimientos migratorios están sujetos a una serie de restricciones por temas de interés o "seguridad nacional", por la clase social, nacionalidad y sexualidad de la/os migrantes, y de manera más general por los miedos a quienes están "peligrosamente cerca".